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No. 28

HARRY HALE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CITY OF THE DEAD.

Far away across the broad Atlantic in the southwestern corner of the Gulf of Mexico, stands the city of Vera Cruz, or, as we should call it in English, the city of the True Cross.

It fronts the sea in a semicircle, and is built on a dry, sandy plain, over which, in certain seasons, the fierce north winds blow with dreadful violence.

It is surrounded by an adobe-wall built of huge slabs of clay baked in the sun—about six feet high, on the top of which is a palisade of wood, rotted with decay.

On the shore on each side of the town the north winds have raised up hillocks of sand, some of them from twenty-five to thirty feet high, which change their form and position every year; and seen from the sea, these hillocks seem to bury the city itself.

At one time, when Spain was rich and powerful, Vera Cruz was the place through which all the trade between that country and Mexico was carried on; but with the decay of the Spanish power, the importance of Vera Cruz has become less and less.

At certain seasons of the year, the town is almost deserted.

With the hot months comes the terrible vomito, or yellow fever; and to escape its deadly hand the greater part of the inhabitants remove to the healthier table-lands of the interior, and reside there during the summer.

The town is thus left to the care of the lowest class of natives—a miserable, degraded set of human beings; and at this time one might walk through the desolate streets and see nothing but gluttonous *sopilotes* or turkey buzzards, which with the lean, yelping dogs, act as scavengers, and greedily gorge themselves with the foul refuse which is scattered about in all directions.

Rightly does the town deserve the name which has been given it by the Spaniards—La Ciudad della Muerto, or City of the Dead—and woe betide the wretched man or woman who is seized by the dreaded vomito, or frequently but a very few hours elapse between the attack and death.

On the 16th of August, 1850, a Spanish brig cast anchor near the castle of St. Juan de Ulloa, which stands on an island opposite the town of Vera Cruz, and about half a mile distant from it.

The white houses of the town glittered in the fierce sunshine as if they had been covered with snow.

A yellow haze hung over the houses and spires of the numer-



ous churches; the sandy coast seemed almost scorched, with the intense heat; while to look at the sea brought a pain into the eyes, so dazzling were the diamond-tipped waves, and so oppressive the color of the gaily-tinted fishes which were swimming in shoals round the vessel.

By-and-by a boat puts off from the ship, and is seen coming towards the town.

It is rowed by four sailors and contains, besides three passengers, a quantity of luggage.

It approaches the shore, the reel grates harshly on the sand, and the sailors spring briskly out.

With a "heave ho!" they haul up the boat, so that her stem is clear of the water, and then assist two of the passengers to get out.

The latter are English, the elder one being a delicate-looking man about forty years of age, while the other is a handsome lad, with a clear, sparkling eye, and fearless looking face.

The boy is apparently about fourteen years of age and, unlike his companion, the very picture of robust health.

In spite of the difference in their appearance, there is sufficient likeness between the two to show they are related, and I may tell you at once that they are father and son.

Mr. Hale—for such is the Englishman's name—has resided in Spain for a year or two, and has now come out to Mexico to take charge of the working of a silver mine at Puebla, a town about one hundred and ten miles from Vera Cruz.

His wife died some ten years before the date at which my story opens, leaving an only son, Harry, between whom and his father a strong affection exists.

Standing together on the shore, they watch their luggage being taken from the boat and placed on the back of a couple of mules, the property of a lazy-looking Mexican; and when all is ready they prepare to walk towards the town.

"Adio, amigo" ("Good-bye, friend," said Mr. Hale, shaking hands with the mate, a swarthy Spaniard.

"Adios, caballeros buen viaje" ("Good-bye, gentlemen, a good journey"), returned the latter, and the boat is pushed off by the sailors, who spring lightly in and take their places at the oars.

Waving a last farewell with their hats, the two travelers slowly follow the mules to the hotel.

As they walk through the deserted streets, the silence which reigns around seems to them most oppressive. Slightly starting as he spoke, Mr. Hale said:

With face flushed and wild with excitement, he seized the captain's hand, and shaking it heartily, cried: "I'll go with you, Captain Raymond, with all my heart."

"I almost wish we hadn't come, Harry. This horrible place puts me strangely in mind of a grave."

"Nonsense, father," returned the lad, in a cheery tone. "Look at that old turkey there! He don't think so, at all events. See, he's gobbling his dinner as if he hadn't eaten anything for a week."

His father tried to smile, but it was not a very good attempt, and taking his son's arm within his own, walked on without replying.

As they went along Harry gazed curiously at the scene around him.

The knowledge of being in a new world, the strange objects which met his view at every turn, the extraordinary fierceness and brightness of the sun, and the wonderful stillness which rested upon the place, produced such a feeling of novelty, that he, like his father, remained silent.

Most of the streets were wide and regular, while some of the houses and churches were well-built and handsome.

The houses of Vera Cruz owe their existence to the exertions of the *madrepore* or coral-maker.

Silently working at the bottom of the ocean for thousands and thousands of years, these little animals have gone on slowly depositing minute particles of lime, until large beds of hard rocks have been formed, which have proved of great value to those places where no stone is to be found.

The inhabitants of Vera Cruz, at all events, have made good use of it; for though of late years stone has been sent from Campeachy, a port in the southeastern corner of the Gulf of Mexico, yet in the early days of Vera Cruz the work of the little *madrepore* was all the material the Vera Cruzians had near at hand.

Soon the glittering whiteness of the houses began to tire, and Harry turned to his father.

As he looked into his face he saw an expression which almost frightened him.

At the same time he felt his father's arm, which was within his own, tremble violently. What could be the matter?

"Are you ill, father?" said the boy, in an anxious tone. "What is it that ails you?"

"Nothing," returned Mr. Hale, faintly. "It was only a slight shiver, Harry; that was all. I seemed to feel a little cold, but it's gone now."

"Cold!" thought Harry to himself. "How strange! Why, I never felt so hot in my life."

But he kept his thoughts to himself, and did not reply.

He did not feel satisfied with his father's answer, for the latter's arm still trembled at intervals, and he seemed now and then to lean upon his son for support.

Watching him intently, Harry saw his father's face suddenly turn a deadly white and his eyes half close. His knees tottered; and he would have fallen had not the boy supported him.

Shouting to the mule-driver to stop, Harry endeavored to keep his father upon his feet.

But it was of no use; the weakness seemed to increase, and the poor man gradually sunk on the ground.

In a state of great alarm, Harry entreated the Mexican in charge of the mules to run for a doctor.

The fellow looked coolly at the sick man, the deathly pallor of whose face had given place to a deep flush, and taking the cigar from his mouth (the Mexicans smoke from morning to night), said:

"*Que vamos paer? Esta muriendo*,"—"What are we to do? He is dying."

"Dying!" repeated Harry, looking wildly at the man. "What do you mean?"

"Lo caballero has the *vomito*," returned the Mexican, carelessly knocking the ashes from his cigar with his *quarta*, or whip, attached to his wrist.

The *vomito*! That frightful scourge of the eastern coast of Mexico! Harry felt himself grow chill with horror.

It could not be, he repeated vainly to himself; for was not his father but a short half hour since perfectly well? No, no; it was some sudden pang, from which he would recover soon.

"Is the hotel far?" inquired the boy hurriedly of the Mexican. "Cannot we carry him between us?"

The Mexican shrank back, crossing himself superstitiously and muttering:

"*Valgame Dios*."

"Then if you won't help me, get a doctor. You can do that, can't you?" exclaimed Harry, impatiently.

"Look, señor," said the man, pointing to the west. "Do you see that yellow mist over there? That is the *vomito*. What is the use of a doctor?"

It is said that when the yellow fever rages violently it is always accompanied by a yellow mist, which hangs over the doomed town or village, and either moves slowly and suddenly from place to place, or remains stationary.

"What shall I do?" moaned the boy, in great despair.

"Shall I ride on to the hotel and send assistance?" said the Mexican at last.

"Yes, yes!" cried Harry, glad of any plan which would help his father. "Quick! there's a good fellow."

The man cracked his whip and drove off the mules at a smart pace, leaving Harry bending over his father, who was lying half insensible, half delirious, on the ground.

CHAPTER II.

A HAPPY MEETING.

WHEN the Mexican left him, Harry endeavored to calm himself until the man should return.

At present nothing could be done to help his father, and all the boy could do was to wait patiently until assistance arrived.

"He will not be more than a quarter of an hour at the outside," he thought.

A quarter of an hour passed; and nobody came.

Then twenty minutes, half an hour, and still Harry was alone.

He began to be alarmed.

"Surely the scoundrel would not play me false. No, no; he would not be hard-hearted enough to do that. I daresay they are looking for a doctor."

A little comforted by this thought, he waited another quarter of an hour, but still no one came.

Two or three ragged and ill-looking Mexicans indeed passed, but they looked upon the dying man as an ordinary sight, and passed on, muttering an "Ave Maria" in answer to Harry's piteous request for assistance.

At length he ran up to the door of one of the houses. He touched it with his hand, and it opened directly. He went in and found himself in an empty room.

Wildly he ran through the house, but it was utterly tenantless, and half-despairing he returned to the street.

He tried another house and another, but with the same result.

The owners had long since fled to Jalapa and other healthy towns of the interior, and had left their property in the City of the Dead to take care of itself.

Half sick with fear he returned to his father, who was evidently getting worse and worse.

His eyes were tinged with yellow, and the color seemed to be extending over his face and neck.

There was no doubt as to the disease with which he had been attacked.

It was indeed the dreaded *vomito*.

Clasping his forehead with his hands, the boy, in an agony of grief, sat down by his father's inanimate body; then, seized with a sudden thought, ran up the street a little distance, where two thoroughfares met, in the hope of seeing some one, but not a soul was in sight.

As he came back he saw with a shudder that two of the loathsome Turkey buzzards had approached within two or three feet of his father, as if waiting for their prey.

They half ran, half flew, upon Harry's running towards them, but only to settle down at fifty or sixty yards' distance.

An hour and a half had passed since the treacherous Mexican had left him, and the boy now was convinced that he had been deceived.

At his wits' end, and sorely troubled what to do, his attention was suddenly aroused by footsteps on the pavement behind him.

Turning round, he saw to his great joy two men who, from their faces, he knew were Englishmen. One of the men was a tall, broad-shouldered, stalwart fellow, of about thirty years of age.

His face was browned by the sun. He had dark curly hair and a thick moustache, while he had a rifle on his shoulder and pistols in his belt.

His companion was much shorter in height, but very thick-set; and by his deep chest and muscular arms and legs, it could be easily seen he was a man of great strength.

He, like the other, had a rifle and pistols, and both were attired in hunting-dresses. They had apparently been on a journey, for they looked travel-stained and weary.

They had evidently seen Harry and his father, for they began to quicken their pace. Greatly relieved, Harry ran towards them, and at once besought them to come to his assistance.

"What is the matter, my lad?" inquired the tall man in a deep, pleasant voice. "You are our countryman, I see, and you may be certain we shall do what we can."

"It is my father who is lying there," explained Harry, rapidly. "He has been taken very ill—with the *vomito* I think they call it, and unless we get a doctor, I fear he will die;" and the poor boy's voice quivered as he spoke.

The stranger shook his head gravely, and said something to his companion in an undertone. Then, hastening towards the spot where Mr. Hale lay gasping for breath, he looked keenly at the sick man.

"I fear, my boy, we have arrived too late. How long has he been lying here?"

"More than two hours," said Harry, in a choking voice. "I sent a mule-driver, who was carrying our luggage, on to the hotel for help two hours ago, and he hasn't returned yet."

"No, and he won't either," said the short man, with a look of disgust. "He's got your luggage, you say? Then you may say good-bye to it, that's all. They're a set of lazy rogues and thieves—that's what the Mexicans are. I should just like to be president for a day or two, and if I wouldn't have the necks of a thousand or two of 'em fitted with ropes, my name isn't Phil Barsham."

"Well, never mind that now, Phil," said his companion. "Let's see what we can do to help this poor fellow. We must get him indoors somehow, that's certain."

Phil nodded, and pointed to the end of the street. "And there's the very conveyance what'll do it, too," said he.

A litter carried between two mules, which is commonly used for traveling in Mexico, and in which the traveler can lay comfortably, screened from the sun, was just then passing the end of the street, and Phil shouted out to the men to stop. They took no notice; but hastened on; whereupon Phil hurried after them, and ordered them to turn back.

"Look ye here," said he, coolly drawing a revolver from his belt, "I don't know much about your foreign lingo, but if you don't bring that there carawan down here, you'll have a taste o' something cold that'll may-be disagree with you."

As a rule, the Mexicans are terrible cowards, and show the white feather very soon.

Not understanding a word of what Philip said, they took him for one of the robbers with whom Mexico

abounds, and immediately dropped down on their knees and roared for mercy.

At this moment, however, Phil's companion came up, and, knowing his peculiarities, bade him put his pistol up, and spoke to the men in Spanish, telling them he wanted to hire the litter for a sick man.

The Mexicans made all kinds of excuses, for they had a horror of the *vomito*; but it was of no use.

They were in the hands of one who would be obeyed, and slowly getting up from the ground, they bore the litter towards the place where the sick man was lying.

Kindly and tenderly the stranger whom Phil called "Captain," assisted Harry to lay his father in the litter, and soon the party were proceeding towards the hotel, whither the luggage was supposed to have been sent.

The hotel was not more than half a mile distant, and was just on the outskirts of the town.

It was a wretched place, and in fact nothing more than a *meson*, as the Mexican inns are called.

It consisted of a stone building, in front of which was a large *corral* or yard.

Round the side of the *corral* were some dirty rooms, most of which were without windows and destitute of furniture, for the accommodation of travelers.

The floors were of clay, and in one corner was a kind of stone couch.

As for seats there were none, but in one of the rooms there was a broken table.

In a corner of the *corral* was the *cocina* or kitchen, while outside was a second yard, where three or four mules were tied up.

Harry gazed with dismay at the wretched accommodation, bad enough for one in health, but horrible for anybody as ill as his father was, and turned a look of despair upon his new friend, the captain.

"It's the best we can get, so we must put up with it," said the latter, shrugging his shoulders.

The fact was that the proprietors of the better class of inns had left the town for the interior, and there only remained the *mesons*, the owners of which were too poor or lazy to remove.

By dint of bullying the landlord, they managed to get a mattress, upon which they laid the dying man, who was evidently sinking fast.

Philip got the address of a doctor, and, accompanied by a Mexican, rode off on the back of a mule to fetch him.

He returned in about an hour's time, but without the doctor, who, he found, had gone to see a patient some miles up the country, and was not expected back before the next morning. Had he come, however, with Philip, his skill would have been unavailing, for Mr. Hale was in the last stage of the dreadful malady.

Harry, who was almost heartbroken, never left his father's side.

Captain Raymond brought him some food and tried to persuade him to eat, but he could not touch a mouthful. About nine o'clock it was plain the dying man could not last more than a few minutes, and the landlord, who was a strict Catholic, besought them to send for a priest.

"Neither the parson nor the clerk won't do any good now. He's a going where he won't want ne'er a one of 'em," said Philip, in reply.

The landlord withdrew, horrified at Philip's irreverent words, and crossed himself a dozen times, on his own account, for having listened to the heretic.

A few minutes more, and Mr. Hale breathed his last.

Hardly realizing he was alone in the world, Harry gazed with a fixed, stony look upon the lifeless body of his father, and scarcely felt the hand of Captain Raymond, which the latter had placed upon his shoulder.

"Come, my poor lad," said Raymond, kindly, "let us go from this place. You can do no good now."

Passively Harry allowed himself to be led from the room, and Raymond, who had made a rough kind of bed in another apartment, prevailed upon him to lay down.

He complied silently, and though he was awake for some time, he at length forgot all his troubles in a sound sleep.

The next morning Mr. Hale was buried—for in hot countries the funeral follows close upon death. He was placed in a little cemetery in the outskirts of the town, and was followed by Harry, Captain Raymond and Philip.

There was no service, for the priest would have refused to have performed any, even had he been requested, and the body was silently and reverently deposited in the grave.

When all was over, a rough wooden cross, with name and date cut into it, was placed over the grave, and Harry and his friends, with sad hearts, left the spot.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING ABOUT THE GOLD COUNTRY.

ALMOST from the time when America was discovered by Columbus, the New World has been looked upon as the country where unbounded stores of wealth lie buried, awaiting only the daring hand of man to lay them bare.

The Spaniards were the first possessors of a vast tract of land, stretching from the north of Mexico down to Terra del Fuego—or at least, if they were not actual possessors of the whole, they had made themselves masters of a very large portion.

Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Brazil, Peru, La Plata—all bear traces of Spanish influence and Spanish habits and customs, although the yoke of Spain has long since passed away.

In the whole of the countries I have named are to be found silver and gold in abundance.

The silver rarely exists pure, but is dug out of mines combined with other substances, generally sulphur and chlorine, but often with iron, lead, and copper.

The gold is also found in mines, but is usually of

tained from the sands which form the beds and banks of the rivers.

There is scarcely a stream in Central America which does not contain gold in smaller or larger quantities, while in some of the rivers it is so plentiful that the Indian women in parts of Honduras need only wash the sand for a short time, and they obtain sufficient gold to supply their wants for many days.

For the last three centuries the minds of countless adventurers have been filled with thoughts of these immense treasures of gold and silver, and often have daring men of all nations started in search of that wealth which was to be had merely for the asking, and in many cases without any asking at all.

Most of the men who thus went out, at all events, for the first one hundred and fifty years, were from Spain, and were, as a rule, cruel and ferocious. They were brave, it is true, but it was the bravery of tigers, and horrible were the deeds which were committed upon the helpless inhabitants.

But besides the Spaniards, a good many men went from England, and among these must be numbered Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake.

Sir Francis Drake, about whom I shall have something to say further on, was what I am afraid, we should call nowadays a pirate and a buccaneer.

He was, of all events, one of the fortunate ones, and secured a vast quantity of gold, which, however, he was destined to lose before his death.

Strange tales some of these bold fellows brought back of the wonders they had seen, and could one believe all that was told, it would almost seem as if gold was as plentiful in that favored land as coal is in ours. It would not do, however, to take all the stories travelers tell for gospel truth; but, although a good deal is overdrawn and imaginative, yet, without a doubt, there is enough gold in that apparently small neck of land which joins the two mighty continents of America together, equal in value to all the money, gold, silver, and copper, which is in circulation at the present time.

For a time the rich supplies of gold from Australia have eclipsed the fame of America; but a day will come when the stream of adventurers will turn, and nothing will be talked about but the gold-digging of Nicaragua, of Guatemala, and of Honduras.

This neck of land, called Central America, is one of the loveliest and most fertile spots in the world. Delicious fruits and gorgeous flowers grow there with a luxuriance of which we in England can scarcely form an idea.

The birds, if they are not very sweet singers, have the gayest plumage to be found anywhere; the fishes even have a brilliancy of tint unknown out of the tropics, while the animals are as curious in variety as they are infinite in number.

But the chief thing which makes Central America so remarkable in its natural history, is the enormous quantity of reptiles which are there to be met with.

Some of the most poisonous snakes find their home in the wild and rank undergrowth of its vast forests. The deadly rattlesnake, with its warning note; the blood-red coral, most beautiful of snakes; the gigantic boa, glossy and brown of skin; the golden snake and the blue snake—all are to be met with in Central America. Then there are lizards in abundance, ranging from bright green specimens of two or three inches long, up to the iguanas, which are sometimes five or six feet in length. As for the insects, were I to name a twentieth of the different kinds which inhabit these regions, I should tire your patience and my own too.

The people who inhabit Central America may be said to be a mixture of the different races. There are the Indians proper, most of whom live on the coasts bordering the Gulf of Mexico, the Bay of Honduras and the Pacific Ocean.

They are, for the most part, very harmless and peaceable; but those who resisted the Spaniards successfully, and retained their independence, are fierce and warlike, and attacked.

The eastern coast of Honduras, reaching down to Nicaragua, is called the Mosquito Coast, and here a race of people, half negro, half Indian live.

They are called Sambos, and have sprung from a number of negroes who escaped from a large slave-ship which was driven ashore in the seventeenth century.

These negroes mixed with the Indians, and were joined afterwards by runaway slaves from the early Spanish plantations, until at last a new nation sprung up.

These Sambos are good-tempered, but very ignorant and lazy, and are altogether a worthless set.

Then come a very large element of the population. These are descended from the early Spanish settlers who have married Indians.

They mostly inhabit the towns and villages, and are, as a rule, weak and indolent.

Lastly, there are the remains of those ancient people whom Cortez and his followers found when they invaded Central America and Mexico in the sixteenth century.

About these races who are now found in Nicaragua and San Salvador—very little is known.

So, I assert, from the resemblance which their language bears to the Mexican, that they spring from the same stock as the ancient inhabitants of Mexico, while others maintain that they are a distinct people.

I am not able to decide the dispute, but merely say that in the ruins of cities of enormous size which have been discovered in various parts of Central America, there is sufficient proof of the existence, hundreds and hundreds of years ago, of a wealthy and intelligent nation, of which almost every vestige has now disappeared.

I said "almost," because the descendants of this mighty nation are now to be found only in the heart of those gigantic forests which are so frequent in Central America.

Here, it is supposed, they practice their ancient and

mysterious religious rites which have been handed down to them from their forefathers, and in their towns, hidden from the gaze of the stranger, they live and die; and as far as our knowledge of them goes, they might be inhabitants of the very sun they worship.

I have thus tried to give some idea of these marvelous people, because they will play a very important part in the wonderful story I am about to relate, and are closely connected with Harry's extraordinary adventures.

How they were connected, and what those adventures were, you will see in due time.

Meanwhile, picture to yourselves all that is thrilling in hair-breadth escapes, in deadly combats with man and with animals, in Nature in her wildest and grandest moods, and you will realize in some part a few of the incidents which happened to our hero in the two years following August, 1850.

We will now return to Harry and his friends, Captain Raymond and Phil, whom we have left at Vera Cruz.

At the death of his father the boy was left in a curious plight.

He knew no one in the town except the two acquaintances he had made; and what was worse, the thief of a Mexican who had been sent for assistance had carried off the whole of the luggage, and with it a large sum of money which was contained in one of the parcels.

"What are you going to do, Harry?" asked the captain as they walked together through a street in Vera Cruz, the day after the funeral.

"I don't know, Captain Raymond. I must get back to Spain somehow, I suppose. I have some friends there, but I don't care much about them."

"How would you like a hunting trip with me?" said Raymond, after a pause.

"Of all things," cried Harry, with sparkling eyes. "But where are you going?"

"Hum—that depends upon circumstances. I haven't quite made up my mind where, but I know pretty well what I'm going after," said the captain, with a peculiar look in his dark eyes.

"And what is that?" exclaimed the boy.

Captain Raymond lowered his head to the boy's ear, and whispered:

"In search of the Golden Island!"

Harry stared at his companion, and his breath came short and fast.

He had never heard of the Golden Island before, and did not know what it meant; but it sounded wild and romantic, and it suited his adventurous spirit.

With face flushed and wild with excitement, he seized the captain's hand, and shaking it heartily, cried:

"I'll go with you, Captain Raymond, with all my heart."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ADVENTURERS START ON THEIR JOURNEY.

Now that Harry's mind was made up, he was very anxious to start on the journey. The mysterious words of Captain Raymond, few as they were, had conjured up all manner of wild dreams, and he could hardly control his curiosity.

He began asking the captain any number of questions about the Golden Island—where it was, what it was like, how long it would take to get there, etc.

But Captain Raymond maintained a provoking silence.

He evaded the lad's questions, and all that Harry could get out of him was that when the proper time came, he would tell him all he knew.

"The fact is, my boy," said he, "what we are going after may not exist at all. It's a matter of chance, and though I'm pretty certain in my own mind, yet I may be wrong. Besides," he added, with a smile, "we may get swallowed up by alligators, or poisoned by snakes, or, more likely than all, get shot by the arrows of the Indians, and then there would be an end of all our fine plans. No, no; you wait awhile, and you shall know all in good time."

Then Harry tried Philip, but the latter was even more obstinate than the captain, so the lad at length gave up his attempts.

They had determined to stop two or three days at Vera Cruz in order to make preparations for their journey, and during that time they busied themselves in buying mules, and hiring a *mozo*, or Mexican guide, to look after them, and in getting together such articles of food, clothing, and ammunition as they thought they would require.

From what Captain Raymond said, Harry found that he and his companion had come a very long distance from the north.

In coming across a rocky, sterile plain, they were unable to find water for their mules.

They had therefore been obliged to leave the poor animals to their fate, and they themselves, after going through great sufferings, had reached a village half dead.

They soon recovered, however, and had made their way to Jalapa, a beautiful town about sixty or seventy miles from Vera Cruz, where they hired fresh mules, and so came on to the latter place.

On the morning of the fourth day everything was pronounced to be ready, and very gay the party looked, each with his bright-colored *serape*, or cloak, strapped on the saddle behind him.

Captain Raymond led the way a little ahead, while just behind him were Harry and Philip riding abreast. Three pack mules bearing the luggage came next, while the *mozo* brought up the rear.

Their destination, so Captain Raymond said, was the Lake of Nicaragua, a distance of something like eight hundred miles in a straight line from Vera Cruz; but making an allowance for the windings of the roads, the travelers had not less than fifteen or sixteen hundred miles to traverse before they could expect to be near their journey's end.

They left Vera Cruz on the northwest, and Captain

Raymond, instead of following the coast line, as Harry thought he would, took a road almost due west.

"Doesn't this seem to be going in the wrong direction?" said Harry to Philip.

"The captain knows what he's about," returned Philip. "If we stopped down in this hole and kept along the coast, the chances maybe are that we should all get the fever, and I don't know as how that ere complaint is to anybody's taste—it ain't to mine, anyway."

For about an hour they rode across a dry, sandy plain, and the heat was almost intolerable. Soon, however, the ground began to rise, and the landscape gradually changed.

On each side they could see mountain rising above mountain, while in front there seemed to be a ridge of immense height, which extended both ways, and appeared to have no end, for toward the north and south it lost itself in the distance.

The most singular part was that the peaks, where there were any, showed clearly against the sky, whilst the bases of the mountains were concealed with a half-transparent mist.

Plants and flowers of gorgeous hues now began to make their appearance, and at last the party stopped before what seemed to Harry an almost impenetrable wall of foliage. The sharp-pointed agave cactus, the broad-leaved plantain, the many shaped cecropias were there, intertwined with creeping plants bearing the loveliest of flowers, and trailing down in rich cascades.

Harry thought he had never seen so beautiful a forest of flowers and foliage; but it was evidently not to the taste of Captain Raymond.

"We've missed the road, somehow," said he in a tone of disgust. "We shall never be able to get through this jungle. Hello, Pedro!" he shouted to the *mozo* who came riding up, making all kinds of apologies.

"How's this?" demanded the captain, angrily.

"You said you knew the road."

"We're not far off," said the *mozo*, "but the mist prevented us seeing it."

He turned his mule towards the south, and, followed by the others, at length came to a narrow path which led up towards the mountain ridge. One after the other filed into this passage, which was in fact nothing but a mule path.

It was very bad riding, for huge blocks of stones every now and then lay in their way, and the prickly plants, which met infrequently met each other from side to side, scratched their faces terribly. But the little mules kept their footing admirably, and no accident occurred.

For about half an hour the path kept ascending, and at length they came out into an open plain dotted with trees.

As they were riding across the plain, Philip suddenly left Harry's side, and riding up to Captain Raymond, said:

"We'd better push on, captain, if we don't want to be drowned."

"Why, what's the matter?" returned the captain.

"Look ye here," said Phil pointing to some dead leaves which were being blown by the wind. "When we started we'd got the wind on our left. Now I'm blest if it ain't got t'other side."

"You're right, Phil," said the captain, after watching attentively. "It's the *terral*, and we shall have something like a storm soon."

"What's the *terral*?" inquired Harry, who had been listening intently.

"It means the land wind. It blows from the northwest, d'ye see, and always comes before the big north winds. It's earlier, though, than ever I heard tell of."

The north winds which sweep the Gulf of Mexico across their height from September to March; but it was then the month of August—near the end, it was true; so that Philip was right when he said they were earlier than usual.

Hot as it had hitherto been, they now seemed to be surrounded with a heat which was almost suffocating. They drove their spurs into their mules and hurried on, and as they did so, big drops of rain began to fall.

The wind veered round to the northeast, and then to the south.

The breeze began to freshen, and all at once the storm burst upon them.

The sky seemed actually to open and let down its waters, so great was the flood of rain which fell.

In an instant they were drenched to the skin, although they succeeded in getting under a wide-spreading tree.

The wind, which had now gone back to the north, blew with fearful violence.

Trees of small size were torn up by the roots, and blown past them as if they had been feathers; and it was only by huddling close together, and standing in front of the tree, that they escaped being thrown down.

Fortunately the tree was of immense size.

What species it was neither Captain Raymond nor Philip could tell; but it seemed to them a kind of oak. Its girth at the broadest part was at least twenty feet, and it stood the tempest bravely.

By-and-by the rain began to abate, and soon the travelers were able to pursue their journey.

They felt wretchedly uncomfortable, though, their clothes were soddened with water.

But there was no help for it, and all they could was to let the sun dry them on their backs.

Very beautiful the country looked after the rain.

All around was one mass of bright green, which glittered in the sunlight, while the pools of looked like so many mirrors, flashing as they with reflected light.

Another hour's riding brought them to the plain, and they saw before them a forest very far to the one through which they had first passed.

The ascent was not so steep as the first, but th

great difficulty in traveling on account of the mud and the numerous streams which they had to pass.

The enormous quantity of birds they saw astounded Harry. In the pools there were any number of ducks, herons, bitterns, and cranes, while the air seemed almost filled with the tiny humming-birds which were darting from flower to flower.

The ducks were of the kind known as the American summer teal, and very beautiful.

They were about the size of our English ducks, but had red bills with a margin of black, green and violet heads, necks of pure white, dark violet brown breasts, bordered with white and black, while the rest of the body was yellowish drab, and black and white.

One of these birds was shot by Philip, but its beautiful plumage did not prevent its being plucked and attached to the saddle-bow in anticipation of dinner.

The path now led down the side of a gully which a swift mountain stream had gradually formed.

There was water at the bottom about ten feet in width, while on each side the banks gently sloped for some fifteen or twenty feet.

"Gently, captain," called out Philip, as Captain Raymond rode down one side. "Look out for the mud."

He spoke too late, for no sooner had the captain's mule entered the stream than it began to sink into the mud which lined the bottom of the gully.

In vain Raymond whipped up the animal, and tried to make it extricate itself.

The more it floundered the worse it got, and soon it had sunk so deep that the water came some distance above the captain's knees.

Philip rode down to the water-side and endeavored to urge on the captain's mule, but it was no good.

Half laughing and half angry, Captain Raymond scrambled off backwards, and, jumping on to the land, tried to turn the animal.

But she would move neither one way nor the other.

"Confound it! here's a pretty mess," exclaimed the captain, as he tugged at the reins.

Philip at that moment looked round for Harry, but to his amazement could see him nowhere.

"Harry!" he shouted.

"Here I am," came a voice from the other side of the gully; and a minute after the bushes parted, and the lad came struggling through.

"Why, how on earth did you get on that side?" called out the captain.

"Just a little higher up the bottom's quite firm," returned Harry. "Tie your lasso to the mule and throw it over to me, and then whip her up."

The traveler in Mexico rarely travels without his lasso, and one end of this was scooped to the mule and the other thrown over to Harry. Then there was a mighty pulling and hauling on one side by Harry and the *mozo*, while the captain and Philip whipped the mule on the other. Floundering and struggling through the mud, with a tremendous effort the mule somehow got across.

But a pretty mess both she and Captain Raymond were in. The mule was plastered with mud up to her saddle, while the captain had a similar coating over his knees. He looked, as Philip remarked, as if he had got his winter stockings on.

But they determined not to go any further without something to eat; so, finding a suitable place, they lit a fire and cooked their duck, seasoning it with some *chile colorado* (or, as we call them in English, chilies).

CHAPTER V.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

ACCORDING to the *mozo's* estimate, another three hours' ride would bring them to a *mason*, so when they had finished their supper they pushed on.

The road in no way differed from that over which they had just traveled. It continually ascended, and by the time evening approached they were at least five thousand feet above the level of the sea.

As they got higher the air became colder, and when they reached the *mason* at nightfall, they were glad enough to see a fire blazing.

As they rode into the *corral* they shouted for the landlord, and asked him to get them supper.

He appeared quite surprised at the order, and he said he had got nothing.

However, by dint of bullying, they got him to confess that he had some eggs.

They were cooked at last, and came up swimming in fat. Then there were some *frijoles*, a small black bean, without which no meal in Mexico is complete, and some badly-baked *tortillas*. The last is a kind of flat cake, and is the Mexican substitute for bread.

The supper did not look very inviting, but our travelers were very hungry, and not disposed to be particular, so they swallowed the greasy meal and retired to rest, having first seen that their mules had been fed and properly secured.

The rooms of a *mason*, as I before described, are placed round the *corral*, and are more like sheds than anything else.

Harry was soon fast asleep; but forgetting that the climate had changed, neglected to wrap himself well up.

About four o'clock, just before daybreak, he awoke shivering with cold, and began looking about for something to cover himself with.

As he was groping about, it seemed to him that there was more noise in the *corral* than there should be, and it occurred to him that some of the mules had got loose.

He peeped out of the door, and could see that, though they were restive, they were, to all appearances, safely tied up.

"I wonder what is the matter with them?" he murmured to himself, striving to peer through the darkness.

Suddenly he rubbed his eyes, and stood still against

the doorway. What was that he could dimly see moving about stealthily? Was it a man?

Harry kept perfectly still, and saw, or fancied he saw, a dark figure glide to the heads of the mules.

It was time, at all events, to set the matter at rest.

Hastening softly to the mattress on which he had been lying, he seized his revolver and went outside.

He was without shoes, so that his feet made no noise.

Going up to the mules, he saw some one was busily at work untying them.

There could be only one motive for doing this at that time of the night, and Harry had not the least doubt the fellow, whoever he was, intended to steal them.

After losing his luggage in Vera Cruz, he had come to be of the same opinion with Philip—namely, that the Mexicans were all thieves.

Few lads of Harry's age had less fear, and without hesitation he went up and laid his hand on the shoulder of the thief.

The man started violently and turned round. As he did so Harry recognized the face.

It was that of their faithful *mozo*!

"What are you doing here, you scoundrel!" cried Harry. "I've a good mind to put a bullet through you."

The Mexican fell into a tremble, and said whiningly, he had come to see whether the mules were safe.

The lad did not believe him. However, he said nothing, but bestowing upon the would-be thief a hearty kick, which the fellow took in good part; he tied up the mules again, while the Mexican slunk away.

He then went back to his room, but he determined to watch in case the robber came back. The latter, however, appeared to have given up the idea, for Harry saw nothing more of him.

The next morning Harry told Captain Raymond what had happened.

"The rascal!" exclaimed the latter. "We must keep a sharp lookout. It won't do to dismiss him just yet, because he's too useful; but if we find him out in any more tricks we'll give him a taste of the stick."

When breakfast—which consisted of *frijoles tortillas* and some fruit—was over, the party again set out.

They had some two thousand feet yet to ascend before they would reach the table-land which lay on the ridge of the mountains, and it seemed to get colder every step they took.

Soon a little snow began to fall, and the ground was lightly covered.

The nature of the vegetation again changed, and the wild luxuriance which they passed through the previous day gave place to bushes and trees of stunted growth.

There were more rocks, too, and the land appeared almost barren.

About midday they entered upon a rocky defile, which at some time or other had been the bed of a stream.

It was now dry and filled with dead leaves, which the wind had blown into it.

No doubt the channel had been stopped at some point higher up, and the current diverted, as, from the appearance of the sides the defile looked as though many years had passed since water had flowed down it.

It was about ten or twelve feet wide where they entered, but narrowed gradually as they proceeded.

They were jogging along merrily enough, when Captain Raymond, who was in advance, suddenly stopped and raised his rifle.

"Look out!" said he, softly. "There's something not quite right ahead."

Instantly Philip and Harry had loosed their rifles and had got them ready for action.

That which had roused Raymond's attention was a man on horseback, who had passed across the end of the defile.

He was fully armed, and was more likely than not to be one of those mountain robbers with whom Mexico abounds.

"There's more of the rascals, you may lay long odds," muttered Phil. "Them cowards don't travel singly."

"And our honest *mozo* is gone, too!" exclaimed Harry, looking round.

It was true.

The fellow was nowhere to be seen.

"He must have given us the slip when we entered the passage," said Raymond. "Are the pack mules all right, Phil?"

"Yes, capt'n," said Phil, "unless the beggar's walked off with anything inside the pack."

"Well, we'll see about that afterwards. From our friend Pedro bidding us good-bye in that unceremonious fashion, it looks like mischief," said the captain, coolly examining his rifle. "But they're such confounded cowards that unless there are twenty of them at least, they wouldn't dare to attack us."

All at once the sharp report of a rifle was heard ringing through the still air, and awakening the echoes far and wide.

It was so close to Harry's ear that for the moment he was stunned.

Turning round, he saw Philip calmly reloading his empty rifle.

"There's one on 'em less, at all events," said he, in answer to Harry's look of surprise.

It appeared that Phil, who had got the eye of a hawk, had seen a face peer over the side of the rocks, about twenty yards ahead, and in an instant had raised his gun to his shoulder and fired.

Raymond was rather vexed with Phil's hastiness, as he did not want to excite the vengeance of the robbers, knowing that oftentimes revenge will take the place of courage.

It was certain the man had been hit, for Phil's aim was unerring, and they could hear a sound as of moaning.

Suddenly, from both sides of the defile, there opened a masked fire, and a rain of bullets rattled down into the ravine.

"The deuce take that unlucky shot of yours, Phil!" exclaimed Raymond. "We're in for it now, and no mistake. Whip and spur, my lads—it's our only chance!"

Fetching Harry's mule a terrific cut on the quarter with his heavy-thonged whip, Raymond dug his spurs into his mule and dashed forward. Close at his heels followed Phil and Harry the mule of the latter, urged only on by Raymond's whip, bounded forward as if mad.

The boy could hardly keep his seat, for the road was nothing but ugly-looking stones and dangerous holes.

Clipping the mule between his knees as in a vice, and clutching hold of its neck the best way he could, he was borne at a tremendous speed through the defile.

How the mules kept their footing he could never understand.

It was all bump, bump, first on one side, then on the other, now almost down on their knees, then up again, leaping over stones two or three feet high.

Sometimes the boy thought he was going to be crushed against the rocky sides of the ravine; then he made sure he was going over his steed's head.

It was a rare race, I can tell you, and though the stakes were for life, there was something in it which the lad enjoyed.

"It's no use trying to guide the critters," shouted Phil. "They'll do better without us. Leave 'em to themselves."

Phil was right.

The sagacious animals seemed to avoid the ugliest-looking places as if by instinct, and somehow or other Harry found himself, breathless and bewildered, on the plain at the end of the defile, while close beside him were Raymond and Philip.

"Come, that's a close shave," said the latter, laughing; "but it's our turn now."

Bang!—bang! went the two rifles into the bushes that lined either side of the ravine, but there was no reply.

"The cowards!" exclaimed Raymond—"they don't dare to meet us now. Well, it's so much the better. Now to reckon up our damages."

But beyond any number of bruises, not one of the party was injured.

It was a miracle: for, from the number of shots which were fired at them as they tore through the ravine, their assailants must have numbered at the very least five-and-twenty.

But the fact was they were too frightened to put their heads over the edge.

They consequently fired at random, and hence their shots fell harmlessly.

Even the pack mules had got through safely. Mules are very companionable animals, and when these three saw their comrades galloping in front, they needed no whip or spur to induce them to follow.

The first thing Philip did was to examine the pack.

Two, he found, had not been touched. From the third, a pouch containing ammunition and a small packet of dollars had disappeared.

"Only just let me catch Master Don Pedro again," said Phil, wrathfully, "and there'll be a little settlement of affairs, or I'm a Dutchman."

CHAPTER VI.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

BEFORE evening they succeeded in reaching the ridge of the mountains.

Here they saw spread out before them a wide plain, which was the table-land, extending from the city of Mexico itself on the north-west, right down to Tehuantepec on the south.

The traveling now became much better, and Captain Raymond told Harry it was his intention to proceed to Tehuantepec, and from there go by sea, if he could, to the Bay of Fonseca—a spacious inlet between the departments of Nicaragua and San Salvador.

If he found he should not be able to go by sea, he should continue his journey overland.

He was in some little anxiety, now that the *mozo* had gone, lest he should lose his way. But, as Philip said, it was better to be without a guide at all, than to be obliged to trust one who was nothing but a robber and a murderer.

There was one thing—he had well studied the maps of the country before starting, and, moreover, was provided with a compass, so that he expected to be able to keep pretty well in the right track.

The night after the fight with the thieves the travelers passed in the open air. It was the first time Harry had done so, and he little thought, as he wrapped himself in his *serape* and laid down on the cold earth, that it would be many months before he should sleep in a bed again.

Situated as they were so many thousand feet above the level of the sea, the weather was very bitter, and though they lit a huge fire, they were half frozen when they awoke in the morning.

Of course a watch was kept, and Raymond would have excused Harry from taking a part in it; but the boy was too independent for that, so he took his three hours' turn with the rest, and tramped up and down the frozen ground, rifle in hand, to keep himself warm.

For about a fortnight they kept on the table-land, and then they began to descend, and the weather got warmer.

During their journey they frequently saw wild animals, but they all ran away at the sight of anybody.

Those they saw the most of were the *coyotes*, or Mexican wolves.

Hungry animals they were, but never fierce enough nor in numbers sufficient to attack the party.

Sometimes they would find two or three lurking round them at dinner or supper time, but they always took care to keep a good distance. There were plenty of wild deer, which furnished them with a fair supply of food, but as they only took the best parts, the *coyotes* came in for a share of the plunder.

Directly the travelers broke up their camp, these hungry animals were on the spot, and commenced devouring every scrap of food they could find.

Once nearly a whole deer was left, and was pounced upon by these *coyotes*, who in a few minutes had bolted every morsel, with the exception of the hair.

But they never ventured near any of the travelers, and as they were not dangerous, it was not thought worth while to waste powder and shot upon them.

One morning Philip, whose turn it was to take the last watch, awoke Harry, telling him there was something for him to see.

In an instant Harry was broad awake, for the wild life of a hunter makes one always on guard.

"What is it?" he cried, springing to his feet, and laying his hand upon his revolver.

"You won't want your popgun," said Phil, laughing at the lad's eagerness. "See there!"

They were at that time about half way down the slope of the mountains, and in the midst of a beautiful savannah, or grassy plain.

It stretched away for miles, and in the distance some rushy pools could be seen, on the surface of which the beams of the rising sun were glancing.

Harry looked towards the pools, which were in the direction indicated by Philip, but could see nothing.

"Wait a bit," said the latter.

In a minute or two Harry saw a dark mass rise from the ground and ascend into the air in a spiral form.

It curled round and round, and looked something like smoke, but Harry had never seen anything of the exact form before.

"What d'ye think that is?" asked Philip.

"Well, it looks as if there was a fire somewhere," returned the lad, a little puzzled.

"Ay, I thought you'd say so," returned Philip, triumphantly. "What d'ye say to birds?"

"Nonsense! they can't be birds," said Harry, in a tone of disbelief.

"Wait a bit," said Philip again. "Now, ain't they birds?" he asked.

Harry stared with all his eyes, and when he saw the spiral column suddenly dissolve into a multitude of little black specks, which dispersed all over the sky, he admitted they might be birds.

"They're swallows, they are," said Philip, in explanation. "What makes 'em do it, I don't know, but they do do it. And what's more odd, they come down in the same way. They build their nest around those rushes, and if you was to wait till evening you'd see that pillar drop down so sudden—they make such a noise, they do, in coming—you'd almost think it was the wind."

Three weeks after they left Vera Cruz they came upon an Indian village. The people were very peaceable, and treated the travelers most kindly. The village consisted of one large house in the shape of an egg, about ninety feet long and forty wide.

Here all the families lived, and were apparently contented and happy.

The house was built of wood, and was thatched with leaves, the thatch coming down to a very short distance of the ground.

When the party rode up to the door, the Indian women, who were busily engaged outside, some making *tortillas*, others crushing sugar-cane, appeared almost frightened, and would have run away, but Captain Raymond made them understand by signs he wished them no harm, so they stayed.

He then gave to one of the women a colored handkerchief, with which she was so delighted that she ran into the hut and returned in a minute or so with a great wooden bowl, filled with some kind of liquid.

It had a peculiar sour flavor, and after drinking it once or twice our travelers got to like it.

They found afterwards that it was called *oulung*, and was made by grinding *cassada* and Indian corn together, and then boiling it.

The liquor then becomes *oulung*, and is a favorite drink of the Indians.

Captain Raymond then made them some more presents, consisting of an old knife, a few buttons, some fish hooks, a trinket or two, and they brought out a great stock of bread—more, indeed, than could be packed on the mules.

Their bread was very good, although it might not have pleased us to live on at home.

Like the *oulung*, it had a sour taste, and was made of *cassada*, in the form of rolls, about as long as your arm, and then baked in leaves.

The party stayed a night with the Indians, and then bade them adieu.

The country through which they were now traveling was one of the most lovely you can imagine.

Sometimes they passed through a mountain gorge so beautiful, covered on each side as it was with ferns of all kinds and the brightest of flowers, that even Philip was obliged to stop to admire.

Then they would enter forests filled with trees of so gigantic a size that a dozen men with hands extended could not stand round them.

Now they would ride over a savannah where the grass seemed as if it were made of velvet, so soft and delicate was it; then they would cross streams which formed cascades and bubbled into little whirlpools as the water came rushing over the rocks.

It was a lovely spot, and how the travelers enjoyed it after the bleak heights of the mountains I need not say.

On the first of October, Captain Raymond estimated that in three days they would reach Tehautepec, which is situated on the gulf of the same name.

They had left the Indian village far behind, and were

about to enter a thick forest which lay at the foot of the mountain slopes.

It was near evening when they reached it, and, after proceeding about a quarter of a mile, they found that the trees stood closer and closer together, and that the branches became so entwined above us almost to shut daylight out.

"I don't half like this place," observed Harry to Raymond, when he had had a few knocks from the low branches, beneath which he and his mule could scarcely creep. "Haden't we better take another way?" he added.

"Well, I don't prefer it, Harry," returned the captain; "but what's to be done—our way lies straight through."

"That's so," struck in Philip, "if we can get through."

If the truth were told, he really could not find his way back if he wished it.

For some little while they had been leading their mules—for it was impossible to ride—and they at last came to what seemed an open space.

They could hear the trickling of water, and the moment this sound caught Phil's ear, he cast his rifle down, and said he was determined to go no further.

Striking one of the matches with which they were provided, Raymond examined the spot, and found it was a space of about four or five yards square.

The bushes within this were of small growth; but all around was a dark impenetrable jungle, and Raymond wondered to himself how they had forced their way through hitherto.



The next instant the pistol was pointed at the crouching animal, and taking aim he pulled the trigger.

Now, I'm of the lad's mind. I b'lieve we ought to go some other way. "Taint safe."

"Fiddlestick!" returned Raymond, half angrily.

"Where is there another way? Besides, I'm not going to turn back now I've commenced."

"Very good," returned Philip, undisturbed.

"Then it's on we go. What the captain says I sticks to."

"Well, I don't much care which way it is," said Harry, "only I don't like this darkness."

"I daresay it'll be better presently," answered the captain. "You know it was very near night when we entered. We'd better camp as soon as we can."

The fact was Captain Raymond was more troubled than he cared to own.

The more they advanced into the forest the thicker it became, and the absence of daylight made it impossible to tell east from west, north from south.

On one side of the enclosure there was a little thin stream of water bubbling and rippling, and this decided the captain to follow Phil's advice to encamp, want of water being the greatest danger the traveler has to fear.

It did not take long to tie up the mules and light a fire.

Some venison was soon broiling on the top, and the travelers made a hearty supper. Then came a pipe, and then Raymond and Harry threw themselves down to rest, leaving Philip to watch by the camp fire.

At the end of his turn, Philip awoke Harry, who took his place.

He sat by the fire for some little time, and then began to doze.

He did not go quite to sleep, but sufficiently so not to know what was going on around him.

All at once he started, and, as is not unusual in such a case, became wide awake.

He stared about him, and the first thing he noticed was that the fire had burnt very low—a few red embers, from which a little smoke was issuing, being all that remained.

He was looking with a fixed gaze into the darkness beyond, when he became conscious of a pair of glistening eyes, which were glaring at him steadily.

Whether the eyes belonged to a beast, a bird, or a reptile, he could not determine, but he was sure they did not belong to a human being.

They were very large and lustrous; the pupil was distended to an enormous size, and there was a peculiar hungry gleam in them which made him shudder.

What should he do?

He was almost afraid to move lest he should alarm the creature.

He turned his head a little and he heard a low growl; but, curious enough, it did not come in the direction of the eyes, but more to the right.

Involuntarily he looked towards the spot from whence the sound proceeded, and to his horror saw another pair of eyes, with the same cruel, hungry stare in them, watching his every movement. But this was not all. Not only could he see a second pair of eyes, but a third, a fourth, a fifth—in fact, he could hardly count them. He grew cold with terror, for there was but one solution of the mystery.

The party were surrounded by wild beasts.

Harry's hand went immediately to his belt, but, to his horror, his pistol was gone. Looking cautiously round, however, he saw it lying on the ground a little distance away. He remembered having it in his hand before he dozed off, and it must have slipped from his grasp and fallen on the ground just out of his reach. He made a movement towards it, but an ominous growl warned him to be careful, and he at once stopped, for one of the creatures, bolder than the rest, had advanced a step or two. How he wished his companions would wake. And yet there was some risk in that too, unless they knew of the danger which surrounded them.

It so happened that Captain Raymond was lying with his head very near to Harry's foot, while his face was turned towards the half-extinguished embers.

A sudden thought struck the lad, and, with an almost imperceptible movement, he extended his foot and touched Raymond on the head.

Just then he heard a scuffling and choking sound in the bushes on his right.

It was about the spot where the mules were tied up.

"They must have got to the mules," thought the lad to himself, with dismay.

Likewise the noise or Harry's foot awoke Raymond, for he suddenly raised his head.

"Hist!" said Harry, in the softest possible whisper, as he saw his companion start—"don't move for your life. We are surrounded by wild beasts, and my pistol is out of my reach."

Instantly Captain Raymond understood the situation. Without moving in the slightest he whispered:

"I'm going to blow at the fire. When you see a blaze, seize your pistol, and fire right at the shoulder. They're pumas, and if there are not too many of them, the shot will scare them away."

It is well known that if a strong light be placed between an observer and the object he wishes to see, the light almost renders the latter invisible. This was what Raymond was going to try. If he could but fan the red embers into a blaze, it would not only prevent the puma from seeing Harry's movement, but might also, provided they were not very ravenous, frighten the others away.

Harry could almost hear his heart beat as he saw the animal crouching and moving its head from side to side.

Never did a minute appear so long as when Raymond was fanning the embers with his breath.

Would the blaze get up again before the puma made its spring?

It was impossible to say, the chances were so even.

Meanwhile, the dull red of the fire changed into a white.

There was a flicker, and all at once a bright flame shot up from the glowing mass.

Now was the time.

Noislessly Harry darted his hand forward and seized his pistol.

The next instant it was pointed at the crouching animal, and, taking a steady aim, he pulled the trigger.

There was a loud report, a frightful yell of agony, and the animal bounded forward right into the middle of the group.

CHAPTER VII.

A FIGHT WITH A PUMA.

THE puma of Central America, generally called by the natives the *leon* or lion, is an animal about four feet long, something like a small lion in the head, but without the shaggy mane of the king of beasts.

It is from two to three feet high, and has a very long, thick tail, while its coat is of one uniform dun color.

As a rule, it flies from man; but if hungry and aroused, it can prove itself a dangerous antagonist.

There is one peculiarity about it, and that is the patience with which it will watch for its prey.

If by chance a solitary traveler, passing through the lonely forest, is seen by a puma, the creature will dog his footsteps sometimes for days together.

Often the victim will fancy his enemy has left him in peace, and for a few hours will go on his way much relieved; but sooner or later he will hear an ominous rustle in the bushes, or will see a gleaming eye in the gloom of the forest, and, if he be unarmed, the dread-

ful feeling of being pursued by an untiring foe will fill his breast with terror, and cause him to be a coward in spite of himself.

You may well imagine, then, that the sudden and unexpected attack of the fierce beast caused Harry to feel uncomfortable. He had expected to have seen the puma drop, or, if not, at all events to turn tail. Instead of that, however, the creature had been rendered fiercer from the pain of the wound, and they were in rather an awkward situation.

The sight of the animal's rage was most horrible. Its lips were drawn tight over the sharp white teeth; its nostrils were distended with passion, while from the green eyes flamed a fire which made one shudder. On its shoulder there was a dark red spot, where Harry's bullet had entered, and blood was issuing from it; but Raymond saw in an instant that the aim had been too high to reach a vital part.

The animal had evidently a good deal of fight left in it still.

When Harry fired, Raymond had started up, but he was not quick enough to escape the paw of the puma.

It had sprung at least ten feet, and its right foot came down upon Raymond's leg, which was fortunately cased in stout leather leggings.

He fell on his back, and remained motionless, knowing that to move would bring upon him, if not death, certainly very severe injury.

With a low growl the beast seized his arm with its mouth, and gave it a shake as if it had been a mouse.

Its sharp teeth penetrated Raymond's stout hunting-jacket, and entered the flesh, but the brave man never winced.

The puma was evidently playing with its prey, for with those massive jaws of his he could have crushed the bone with ease.

There was not a moment to be lost, for the creature would soon go to work in earnest.

Philip all this while had not been idle.

He was awakened by the spring of the animal, and had indistinctly rolled himself away at the very moment of the attack.

Leaping to his feet he grasped his rifle, and at once took aim.

Unfortunately, Raymond's body was dangerously near the most vulnerable part of the puma, and there was considerable risk in firing.

Unless the beast was killed right out, another wound would only make it more savage.

"Slip round, and fire at its ear, Harry," whispered Phil.

Harry did so, but the puma seemed to know what he was going to do, and letting go its hold of Raymond's arm, lifted its head and glared savagely.

That look was its last, for the next moment a shot from Phil's gun entered its brain, and it rolled over to rise no more.

Now that the danger was past, Harry looked round for the others, but to his surprise not one was to be seen.

"The fire has frightened 'em off," said Phil, as he pulled the animal away from Raymond's body, on which it had fallen, and assisted him to rise.

"That was a close shave, and a nasty grip, Phil," said Raymond, stripping off his coat.

"Are you hurt much?" anxiously inquired Harry.

"Only a scratch or two, Harry. By jove! 'twas a lucky shot of yours, Phil; the rascal had just begun to taste the flavor of a white man."

Raymond's arm was soon tied up, and he thought no more of the wounds. But his arm was not the only damage the creature had inflicted.

"I say Phil, I shouldn't be surprised if we find some of our mules missing. There was a horrible sound like gnawing and crunching just before I fired," cried Harry, suddenly remembering the noise he had heard.

Phil uttered something very like an oath, which was excusable under the circumstances, and seizing a fire-brand for a torch, he dashed into the brushwood, followed by Raymond and Harry.

Their worst fears were more than fulfilled. One of the mules was torn to pieces, and scarcely anything remained but a few bones. Another was altogether missing and had evidently been dragged away, while a third was so fearfully lacerated that Phil compassionately finished its sufferings. On the ground where the three packs (for it was the pack mules which had been attacked), the coverings torn into strips, and the contents strewn about.

In a state of dismay the three gazed at each other with blank looks.

Phil was the first to break the silence.

"Well, I'm blest!" said he at last. "We're in a pretty pickle, and no mistake. Poor Bess," he continued, looking at the mule which he had been obliged to shoot; "she was the best-tempered and surest-footed beast on this side of the Atlantic, and that's saying a good deal."

There was no help for it. All they could do was to pick up their scattered property and place it as well as they could on one of the animals which they had left.

When this had been done, Raymond looked a few moments at the mule which was lying dead.

He examined the wounds carefully, and closely inspected the head.

"Look here, Phil," said he, suddenly, pointing to the mouth and neck of the mule, "what do you think of that?"

Phil bent down, and after a few moments, said, with a shake of his head:

"That wasn't the work of pumas. There's some other war-mints been at the feast."

"Some other animal!" said Harry, in surprise. "Why, what do you mean, Phil?"

"What I mean is this, that these mules have been killed by jaguars, and not by pumas," returned Phil.

Captain Raymond nodded, as if to say, "You're right, Phil."

"Then that was the reason of the funny sounds I heard!" cried Harry.

"Yes," replied Raymond. "The jaguar has rather an odd way of seizing its prey, and it can't be mistaken. Just look at the mouth of this poor beast. It's torn both on the upper and lower jaw."

"So it is," exclaimed Harry, holding a torch of pine, which he had cut and lighted, close to the dead animal's head.

"The jaguar," continued Raymond, "when it attacks animals of any size at all, springs upon them from behind. It generally gets on the shoulders, and fixing its hind claws on the animal's body, presses the nostrils and mouth with its fore paws. Then it gives a mighty squeeze, and if it don't suffocate the poor beast, it breaks its neck. Sometimes it does both. But I don't believe we should have been attacked if our fire hadn't gone down."

"It's rather rum, though," said Phil, reflecting, "that the jaguar let us alone while the pumas attacked. A jaguar's a deuced awkward customer to deal with."

Phil was right. The jaguar is the fiercest animal that haunts the forests of America, and is almost as formidable an antagonist to the American traveler as the lion and tiger are to the people of Hindoostan or Africa.

"I think I can tell why," said Raymond. "The pumas must have attacked the mules first, and while so engaged were interrupted by the jaguar. The latter, being the strongest, drove them off, and then the infuriated pumas happened to come across us. If we had been awake, and our fire blazing, they would not have dared to approach."

There was little danger of a second attack, but in case the jaguars, excited by the taste of blood, should come back, the travelers brought their three remaining mules into the place where they had made their camp.

Tethering them securely to stakes driven in the ground, they made up a tremendous fire, and kept watch through the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOST IN THE FOREST.

SOMEHOW or other, that night never seemed to come to an end. According to their calculations, they made it out to be two o'clock in the morning when the pumas attacked them. Quite four hours had elapsed since then, and yet there was no appearance of daylight.

"Well, this is about the strangest fix I was ever in," exclaimed Phil, his patience almost exhausted. "Aren't we never going to see the sun again?"

"Are you sure it is not day already?" inquired Raymond, quietly.

"Well, it don't look much like it—do it, Harry?" returned Phil.

"No, you're right there," said the lad.

"And yet I'd wager my rifle against your tattered pack-covering that the sun has risen these two hours," replied Raymond.

All at once Harry remembered the darkness of the preceding evening—how they had hesitated about entering the forest, and how the night had seemed to come on so rapidly.

"You don't mean to say, captain, the leaves and branches are so thick overhead the daylight can't get through?" he asked, in a tone of dismay.

"That's just what I do mean," returned the captain, calmly. "And as far as I can tell, we may have to stop in this place for days."

This prospect almost took the lad's breath away. Who could tell what frightful creatures might not exist in the forest, through which, perhaps, the footsteps of man had never before passed.

As he thought over the horrors of the place, the scene around, lighted up as it was by the ruddy glow of the camp-fire, seemed to grow wilder. The smoke which curled upwards appeared to take the form of uncouth beasts; and the trunks of the trees, entwined as they were with hundreds of creeping plants, looked as if they were being embraced by serpents—and, indeed, as he had seen several serpents glide across their path in the course of their journey when entering the forest, there was some excuse for the lad's fancies. There was only one thing that made the forest seem not quite so terrible as it was on the previous night, and that was it was not so still. There was an incessant rustle as animals of different kinds forced their way through the rank undergrowth. Overhead, monkeys kept up a continual chatter, while parrots were screaming hoarsely in all directions.

"Suppose I climb up one of these trees, cap'n, and see if I can see daylight?" said Phil, half in jest.

"Capital!—and I'll go as well," shouted Harry, taken immensely with the idea.

No sooner was the plan suggested than the two began to put it into execution. Arming themselves with their sharp machetes, or Mexican knives, they began to climb one of the easiest-looking trees they could find. It was not very difficult work, for the trunk was so covered with a tough liana (a species of climbing plant) that it wasn't unlike climbing up a ship's rigging.

When they had reached about thirty feet, Phil came to a halt, and called out:

"Steady there below."

"What's the matter?" shouted Harry, whose head was about a foot from his companion's heels.

"Poof, poof!" spluttered Phil, making a great noise with his mouth, and shaking his head violently.

It sounded so comical to hear Phil coughing and sneezing in the tree that Harry burst into a shout of laughter.

"You'd cough, too, if you'd had such a mouthful as I had," said Phil as soon as he could speak. "Ough, ough—the horrible stuff!"

The fact was, Phil had poked his head into some decayed and rotted bird's nest, which perhaps had been there for years and years. It crumbled into an immense mass of powder directly it was touched, and the whole tumbled about Phil's head, filling his mouth, nose, and eyes with a hot, pungent substance which nearly suffocated him. No wonder he had a fit of coughing.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Harry. "I beg your pardon, Phil, for laughing, but your voice sounded so droll up there. Ha! ha! ha!"

"It's all very well for you to laugh now, Master Harry," remonstrated Phil. "Only wait till you get in a scrape, and it'll be my turn."

"All right, Phil. I won't laugh any more," said Harry; but in spite of his words he could not help occasionally exploding whenever he heard Phil coughing, which he did pretty often.

They now had to use their knives rather freely, for it was almost impossible to make their way through the immense mass of foliage. However, they persevered, and soon after had the satisfaction of seeing the sun's rays through the little chinks which grew larger and more numerous every foot they ascended. But, although they were heartily glad to see the sunlight, yet when they thought of the darkness they had left behind, a feeling of dread ran through them; for might they not have to pass hours, perhaps days, in total darkness?

At last Harry heard Phil give a shout of triumph. "We're through!" he called out; and in a few minutes Harry was by his side.

What a sight was that which met their eyes! From east to west, north to south, stretched a mighty forest.

The tree they were on must have been considerably over a hundred feet high, and yet it was by no means the tallest.

Towards the north and east, the land, or rather the trees, rose, while in the southwest they were lower; and as far as Phil could judge, the forest seemed to be situated near the top of an immense slope, extending from north to south.

Let them look in whatever direction they might they could see nothing but a wide expanse of sky and forest.

But after the first feeling of wonder and admiration had gone off, there succeeded one of disappointment.

As far as they could tell, there was no limit to the forest, and as their position gradually became realized, they looked at each other in despair.

"I'm afraid we've got a bad job here, Harry, my lad," said Phil. "We may as well say good-bye to the Golden Island."

Harry looked at the rough face of his companion a moment, and saw no hope written there.

"Do you mean to say we shall never find our way out of this forest?"

"It'll be nothing short of a miracle if we do," returned Phil, grimly.

"Well, look here, Phil. I am only a boy, you know, and I've come with you, not knowing where you were going, but trusted in you. Captain Raymond has told me he was going in search of a Golden Island, but nothing more. If he hadn't said as much as he did, perhaps I shouldn't have come; but now that I am here, I don't mean to give up while I've any life left."

Harry's determined words had a great effect upon Phil.

"Hang me, if you ain't a plucky one!" said he, brightening up—"and, by George," he added, "I won't be turned back neither."

"Let's give three cheers for the Golden Island!" shouted Harry, enthusiastically.

Phil chimed in with the humor of the lad, and they both gave three ringing cheers, which had the effect of sending a cloud of birds scudding across the sky.

One or two were of large size, and had enormous long legs, which stretched behind them, corresponding in length to their lanky necks, which extended far in front.

They were not ungraceful, and in the sun their brown plumage had a peculiar bright gleam, while their necks seemed of snowy whiteness.

They were different, you see, to the cranes of Egypt and other places, where they are generally all white.

Phil no sooner saw these birds than he seized Harry by the hand, and sent out another cheer from his broad chest.

"Hurrah!" he cried; "you've saved us, my lad. Hurrah!"

Harry stared at Phil, as well he might, and began to wonder if misfortune had turned his brain.

"Don't you know what them birds are?" he inquired.

"No," returned Harry. "They look something like swans, if it wasn't for their color."

"They're cranes—that's what they are; and though we can't see no break in the forest anywhere, I'm as certain sure there is one as if we had it now afore our eyes."

"Why, how's that?" said Harry, with a look of inquiry.

"Why, you see cranes invariably pick their spots close by the banks of rivers, or nigh some kinds of marshy ground. They couldn't live in forests, 'cause they wouldn't find the soft, moist food they like. Consequently," continued Phil, triumphantly, "there must be a river or an open space of some kind near, although we don't see it. Now, those birds, which our shouts frightened off, come as near from the southwest as may be, and what we've got to do is to make our way towards that quarter."

Harry felt Phil was right, and so both hastened to descend.

They found going down was easier work than coming up, and in a few minutes they were once more on firm ground.

They found Captain Raymond standing by the camp fire, leaning on his rifle.

He was smoking, but his face was troubled and thoughtful.

"Well," said he, "what news?"

"Good news," said Phil. "We shall soon be out of limbo," and Phil went on to tell about the cranes he and Harry had seen.

"There's no doubt of the existence of an open space somewhere," said Raymond, who was fully aware of the important meaning of the flight of the cranes; "but how we're to get there puzzles me, to say nothing about the mules."

Phil looked very downcast as he gazed upon the dense wall of tropical plants with which they were surrounded.

He knew well enough Raymond was right, and that indeed they had not conquered all their difficulties.

"Can't we cut our way through?" inquired Harry, eagerly, who, boy-like, overcame all difficulties and dangers easily—in imagination.

"Try it, Harry," said Raymond, with a laugh.

Nothing loth, the lad attacked the jungle with his sharp knife, but to his amazement he was tired out before he had made his way a foot.

He found no difficulty in cutting through the soft stems of the luxuriant tree ferns; but the cactus and the aloe were different things altogether.

His hands and face were scratched in all directions by the spines and thorns which he encountered, while the immense trunk of a mahogany tree, which the darkness prevented him from observing, stopped his progress altogether.

Light had not penetrated into the depths of the forest for years, and many of the bushes were simply masses of rotten wood; but the difficulty of passage was not at all lessened thereby.

"You're right, captain!" he exclaimed, throwing down his *machete* in disgust. "We shall want seven pairs of arms each to get through this. I wish we had two or three pieces of artillery to make a hole for us."

"Ay, or an elephant or two to trample down a few of these bushes," chimed in Phil.

"Well," observed Raymond, quietly, "as we don't happen to have a train of artillery nor any elephants, we must find some other way. While you've been talking, I've been thinking over a plan which may, perhaps, turn out all right, but I'm not certain. You see this little stream, don't you?"

Yes, Phil saw it right enough; but he couldn't tell what it had to do with their escape.

"Well, then, I'll show you. When you were on the top of the tree, you noticed, you said, that the spot on which we are now standing was near the top of an immense slope—that is to say, all the ground south of us is much lower."

Phil nodded, as much as to say—"That is so."

"Now," continued Raymond, "I agree with you that there is a river or an open space somewhere not a great distance; but supposing we were able to cut our way through the jungle, it doesn't follow we shall come out—if we ever do come out—on the right spot."

"That's very well put, cap'n," objected Philip; "but you know we can steer whichever way we like by our compass."

A compass is just as necessary to a traveler in an unknown land as it is to the mariner on the sea.

"I am aware of that," joined Raymond. "But in this case I think I know of something which will guide us better than the compass. It is that little stream," he added, pointing to the bubbling water which was flowing rapidly at their feet into the brushwood, where it was lost to sight.

"Now, you see," continued Raymond, "that stream as nearly as possible follows the direction of the slope—namely, from north to south. Consequently, it's very likely it runs right away down to the river or the marshes you spoke of."

"Cap'n," said Phil, solemnly, "I believe you've hit it—that I do. You mean us to follow the course of the stream—ain't that it?"

"That's exactly what I mean. The jungle looks just as thick where the stream loses itself as anywhere else; but if you notice, the water has already made a small channel for itself, and the lower we get, the wider and deeper will be the channel, because the water will increase in quantity. I shouldn't be much surprised if the stream don't take its rise at a very little distance from us."

"By George, cap'n, there's something in what you say," exclaimed Phil. "I vote we start at once."

"With all my heart!" exclaimed Raymond; and, having gathered all their property together, and packed it on one of the mules, with new hope the three went to work to cut away the jungle over the little stream.

The plants which they attacked had very likely been growing for years and years; and though most were of a juicy, succulent kind, which resisted the knife very little, yet some had reached such a height that it was useless to attempt to cut them down. They therefore cut them as close as they could to the ground, and then made another cut about five feet from the first, and removed the piece between the two cuts. The upper part of the plants being entwined with vines and lianas, which again were attached to the immense forest trees, the parts of the plants which were left were really suspended in the air. Thus they made a sort of covered way right through the jungle, sufficiently large to admit of the mules passing through.

They worked so well that in three hours' time they had succeeded in cutting their way through about fifty feet. The only danger which they apprehended was from the numerous snakes with which they knew the forest was filled.

Fortunately those they saw were not venomous, and hitherto all went well.

To their great delight, the channel of the stream began to deepen, and there was soon quite a foot and a

half space between the pebbles, over which the water ran, and the overhanging shrubs. They at first stood with a foot on each side of the little brook; but now it widened, and they were obliged to work standing in the water. As they cut their way through, they saw numbers of little rivulets emptying their contents into the larger stream.

It was still the rainy season, although near the end, and the stream was simply one of the many which carried the moisture from the mountain into rivers which doubtless ran at its base.

As they went on, the work became less and less hard.

Soon they could, by stooping low, creep along the channel under the bushes; but it was not high enough for the mules, so they went on working a little longer.

As for the mules, poor animals, they stood in the stream, patiently watching their masters, and advancing step by step after them.

CHAPTER IX.

HARRY MEETS WITH A SINGULAR ADVENTURE.

The banks of the stream, from being two or three inches in height, had now increased to as many feet.

The travelers had now no further need of their knives, for they could walk upright without much difficulty.

The water had, however, increased in depth, and had for some time past reached their knees.

Now that they could do so with safety, they mounted their mules, and began to think of something to eat.

But here was a difficulty.

All that was eatable in their packs had been carried off by the wild beasts, and, to tell truth, a good deal that was not eatable as well.

Phil, however, had a few stale *tortillas* in the capacious pocket of his hunting-dress, and with this the weary travelers were forced to be content.

The time had gone so fast that they scarcely knew how long they had been working.

They judged, however, that the day was spent, and feeling much fatigued they halted, and began clearing a space on the bank where they could encamp for the night.

There was no lack of wood to burn, so they soon had a roaring fire, which in their wet and hungry state they by no means despised.

The mules were certainly better off than their masters, for they had plenty of food, though it was rather rank and coarse.

The three adventurers seated themselves round the fire, and Raymond and Philip prepared to smoke, as the only supper which they were likely to get that night.

Harry wrapped himself in his blanket, his thoughts running upon fat venison steaks; and he was just thinking that, after all, sleep was the best substitute, when he was suddenly aroused by a peculiar hissing sound.

He was about to start to his feet, when he heard Raymond say in a whisper:

"Sit still, Harry; we're in luck. It's only an Iguana lizard."

Whatever an Iguana lizard might be in temper and disposition, he was certainly not very good-looking.

Turning his head in the direction of the sound, Harry saw what seemed to him to be a small crocodile.

It was a lizard about three feet long, the upper part of the body being of a greenish yellow, and the tail of a brownish hue.

On its back was a fringe of horny scales, which stood up erect, something like the back fin of a fish, only of course much longer.

It had got its back arched, its mouth was opened to a prodigious size, and its tongue darted about so swift that the eye could not follow it; its throat swelled, while its eyes were like live coals, so bright did they gleam.

As it seemed to Harry, it was fierce and dangerous, but in reality it was perfectly harmless.

"Here's some supper for us," cried Phil, as he brought his rifle to his shoulder.

But he was too late. Before he had time to pull the trigger, the creature had turned, and, with the rapidity of lightning, had glided down the bank into the stream.

Philip fired, but the bullet glanced off from the horny scales of the reptile, and so the lizard got away unharmed.

"There goes our supper," said Raymond, laughing at Philip's disappointed face.

"You don't mean to say you eat those horrid-looking things?" exclaimed Harry, in great disgust.

"Don't I?" returned Phil. "I only wish I had one here now, nicely cooked—that's all."

Harry's face here looked so comical—for the idea of eating one of those frightful looking reptiles almost made him sick—that both Raymond and Phil burst out laughing.

"You wait till you've ate one or two, and you won't think them so frightful," said the former.

"If I were only sure the sun got into this place, I'd have a search for some eggs," said Phil, instinctively turning up his head towards the sky.

As he did so, Harry saw he had become greatly excited.

He rubbed his eyes, looked again, and then, bringing his hand down on his knee with a tremendous slap, exclaimed:

"Stars, by jingo!"

"Thank heaven!" cried Raymond. "Then we're out of this frightful darkness."

It was true.

Peeping here and there some stars could be plainly seen, and now there was no doubt that they were getting to a much clearer part of the forest.

Harry's delight was unbounded. He thought stars

were never so beautiful as those he saw that night, few as they were.

"And now," said Phil, when the first transports were over, "see if I don't have a search for some eggs." He seized a firebrand and went some little distance down the bank.

Soon he came to a place where apparently it had broken away, and left the sand exposed.

He held the torch close to the ground for a moment or two, and then gave a loud:

"Hurrah!"

The next instant he was down on his knees, and digging vigorously into the sand with his fingers.

In about five minutes he came running back with his hat full of eggs.

"Hurrah!" he shouted again; "we shall have some supper, after all."

The eggs were about the size of pigeons', but differed a little in the fact that both ends were the same, instead of one end being more pointed than the other, as is the case with fowls' eggs.

"Did you find these in the sand, Phil?" asked Harry much astonished. "Why, what a runny place for birds to lay their eggs in!"

"Yes, ain't it?" replied Phil, with a merry twinkle in his eye. "And a mighty funny bird it is that laid them, too," he continued, with a half wink at Raymond.

Funny or not, the eggs were soon cooking in the hot embers of the fire, Phil acting as cook with much enjoyment.

There were about a dozen of them, and when they were considered done, the cook placed them on leaves, which made excellent dishes, and handed them round.

You may be sure that with their keen appetites the travelers very much enjoyed their supper; and indeed there are many things worse than roasted eggs.

Harry ate his with immense gusto, for they seemed to him to be delicious.

He could not understand, however, how it was. Captain Raymond and Phil kept exchanging looks and laughing.

"I should think the birds that lay these kind of eggs must be very nice eating," said Harry, when the supper was over. "What are they like, Phil?"

Phil here exploded into a fit of laughter, and Harry, half offended, turned to Captain Raymond and put his question again.

"Well, Harry," said the latter, controlling his merriment, "I don't think it'll be necessary to give you much of a description, because it's very probable you've seen the mother of them this evening."

"I've seen their mother!" exclaimed Harry, thoroughly mystified, and yet with an uneasy thought in his mind.

"Yes," returned Raymond, evidently enjoying the boy's bewilderment; "and what's more, if Phil hadn't been so slow, you might have tasted their mother."

"You don't mean," said Harry, turning pale at the idea—"you don't mean that—that I've been eating lizard's eggs!"

"Yes, I do," said the captain, laughing heartily; "and very much you seemed to enjoy them."

Poor Harry! I can hardly describe his uncomfortable sensations.

To think he had got three of those frightfully ugly things in his inside.

His first thought was that he must be sick; but, somehow or other, he wasn't, and, strange to say, seemed none the worse for his supper.

"How about the bird's nest, Master Harry?" cried Phil, shouting with laughter. "It's my turn now."

After a bit Harry was fain to make a truce, and to declare that Phil had had his revenge. Indeed, he went so far as to say that in a little while he might be tempted to eat another lizard's nest or two.

The incident, at all events, put them into good spirits, and all enjoyed their night's rest.

The last watch was taken by Raymond, and eagerly he waited and longed for the coming of dawn.

When he saw the darkness overhead rapidly change—for in the tropics there is no twilight—he could scarcely control his excitement, and he was obliged to awaken his companions, so anxious was he to share his enjoyment with some one.

"Look there," he exclaimed, pointing to the sun's rays, which shot slantingly down between the trees. "Does it not make your heart glad to see that? It does mine, I can tell you."

"And mine," said Phil.

"And mine, too," echoed Harry.

For some moments their hearts were too full to talk much.

They could but drink in the bright sunshine, and that alone contented them.

By-and-by this keenness of their sensations wore off, and then came a new excitement—breakfast. This they supplied by means of fish, and once more they started on their journey.

Raymond estimated that they had come about a quarter of a mile from the point where they first began to cut.

This seems but a little distance, considering the time they had been about it; but it must not be forgotten that cutting through the jungle was very hard work, and of course they made but slow progress.

During the whole of that day they rode along in the stream itself.

It was not deep, but gradually widened.

The bed, however, grew more rocky, and the riding became more and more difficult.

On the morrow, Raymond determined to try the bank, although the vegetation was still very dense. With care, however, they managed to penetrate through the forest, which they were glad to see got clearer as they advanced.

The scenery at times was very beautiful.

The stream was frequently dammed up by stones, dead leaves, and branches of trees, which had fallen

higher up, and had been borne along by the current, until they met with something that stopped them.

At these places the water extended on each side, and formed pools of exquisite loveliness.

The journey was now very pleasant; there was a road for traveling, they never wanted for food, while they met with few interruptions in the way of savage beasts or poisonous snakes.

As they rode along the third morning after they had come into daylight, Harry reminded Captain Raymond of their conversation in Vera Cruz.

"You were going to tell me something about the Golden Island, you know, Captain Raymond, when the proper time arrived. Don't you think the time has come now?"

Raymond half laughed at the lad's words, and said:

"Well, very nearly. I thought, when I first saw you, you had got some spirit, and I've not been disappointed. Wait until we camp to-night, and I'll tell you something more about the wonderful island, and about myself as well."

Harry's eyes sparkled, and he thanked his companion warmly.

All morning Phil had been rather fidgetty. He kept glancing at the sun and then at the stream, and seemed to be brooding over something. At last he burst out with:

"I say, cap'n, it strikes me we shall have to make a turn. D'ye see that the stream's altered its course, and we're a-going due west? Now, that ain't our way quite, you know. We want a point or two to the south-east."

"By Jove, you're right, Phil; but perhaps it's only a bend in the river," said Raymond.

"No, it ain't," returned Phil, with a shake of his head; "it's been gradually bearing round to the west for the last five or six miles or more."

Raymond took out his compass, and after looking at it, said, hesitatingly:

"I'm afraid we shall have to cross the river. It would take us too much out of our way to go to Tehuantepec now. Besides, there's the risk of getting a boat. No, we'll cross."

Phil entirely agreed with this, and rode his mule down to the water's edge, followed closely by Raymond.

They had then reached one of the pools I mentioned above.

It was some twenty-five yards across, and the current was half-stopped by two huge trunks of trees which lay at right angles to the stream, while the shape of the land aided in confining it.

The water which ran over the trunks made a cascade of some three or four feet in height, and then formed itself into a stream scarcely six yards in width, but which ran between steep banks.

As Phil's mule placed its fore feet in the water, its rider stopped, hesitating whether it would be best to cross over a pool of such width and unknown depth, or whether he had better attempt the steep banks and the narrow stream.

While he was thus debating with himself, he had not noticed that Harry had advanced some twenty yards into the pool, the water reaching nearly to the mule's body.

By this time, however, he caught sight of the lad, and he shouted to him to stop.

To his amazement, he suddenly saw the mule give a leap into the air as if it had been shot, while at the same instant Harry was sent flying over his head at least six feet.

The lad seemed to recover himself for an instant, and struggled to the bank, which he clutched convulsively.

But it was not for long; for, letting go his hold, he dropped into the water.

Raymond then saw a dark serpentine body, about three or four feet in length, and about five inches in diameter, swimming for an instant on the top of water, then disappear.

There was no doubt as to what this animal was.

It was the terrible *gymnotus*, or electric eel.

CHAPTER X.

AN ELECTRIC EEL.

Now Phil had never seen electric eels before, and I very much doubt whether he had ever heard of them, so that Harry's mysterious fall completely staggered him.

The behavior of the mule, too, was most extraordinary. It seemed to be stunned and senseless, and had evidently fallen on its knees, for its head only could be seen above the level of the water.

"Mercy on us, cap'n!" cried Phil, in dismay, "what's the matter with the lad? Hold up, Harry!" he shouted, preparing to spring off his mule.

"Don't do that, Phil," exclaimed Raymond, seizing his arm. "If one of those eels touch your body, you'll be a dead man. We must ride on, and let the mules take their chance."

Raymond had had some experience in Guiana of electric eels, and knew if a shock were given to a horse or mule, the rider would feel but little of the effects.

True, it would be rather bad for the animal, as in the case of Harry's mule; but that could not be helped.

Meanwhile Harry was lying motionless on the surface of the water. After he let go his hold of the bank, he seemed to have completely lost his senses.

Fortunately, he was on his back, and though only his face could be seen, yet it was sufficient to give hopes to his companions.

It was no light task which Phil and Raymond had to perform.

They did not know how deep the water was, while they were exposed to the same danger which had caused Harry's accident.

Every step brought them into deeper water, and they had not nearly reached the middle.

Raymond never took his eyes off the lad.

Somehow he felt he was bound to rescue him, even at the risk of his own life, and he urged on his mule as fast as was practicable.

Suddenly he exclaimed:

"See, there, Phil! Hasn't he got his eyes open?"

Phil uttered an exclamation of surprise—and no wonder; for though the boy was evidently unable to speak, yet he certainly had his eyes open.

Greatly excited, Phil cried:

"Keep quiet, my lad, for half a minute, and we'll soon have you out."

But Phil reckoned without his host, or rather without the dangers of the pool.

As he spoke, he all at once sank in the water, and would have disappeared entirely had not Raymond caught hold of the reins, and kept the mule's head above the surface by main strength.

The fact was he had slipped into a deep hole, and was altogether in an awkward plight.

Struggling and plunging violently, Phil's mule seemed to be aware of her danger, and made a game effort to reach the higher ground where Raymond was, but without success.

"She'll never do it," gasped Phil, whose mouth had been two or three times filled with water, "with me on her back."

"Try once more," shouted Raymond, giving another mighty tug at the reins.

The mule exerted all her strength, but Phil was no light weight, and, exhausted with her previous attempts, she failed to extricate herself.

"Here goes!" cried Phil. "Keep tight hold on her, cap'n."

Giving a spring, Phil threw himself off, and swimming two or three feet to where Raymond was—the water at the place being little more than a yard deep—he stood upright, while his mule, relieved of the weight on her back, gave a vigorous plunge forward, and struggled out of the hole.

All this, though it takes some time to write, did not really occupy more than a minute, and when the two men again looked at Harry, they saw his position remained the same.

A few strides more, and the water came above their saddles; but by holding the heads of their mules as high as they could, they found that they would be able to reach the lad.

Indeed, if they had reflected a moment, they must have remembered that if Harry's mule could have got so far across without losing her footing, so could theirs.

They had started, however, from a different point, and having to cross the pool in a slanting direction, they had not, of course, taken the same track.

A very little time sufficed to bring them close to Harry, and though the bank was a little steep, they determined to ascend it.

Getting off his mule, Raymond seized Harry by the arms, and struggled up the bank with him, while Phil busied himself in securing the lad's mule, which appeared to be dead.

They had a little difficulty in dragging the animal up the bank, but they accomplished it at last.

As for their own mules, they climbed up easier than their masters had done, for mules are used to climbing all sorts of difficult places.

When once out of the water, Harry was soon able to speak, and he told his companions that when he was thrown off he felt a sensation as if hundreds of thousands of pins were being stuck into him. He was quite conscious of the attempts which were made to save him, but somehow his tongue seemed paralyzed, and try as much as he could, he was not able to utter a word.

"I can't make it out at all. It was just as if a mine had been sprung under Paquita's feet. 'Poor Paquita!' he added, looking affectionately at his mule, which was laying on its side apparently dead; 'will she come round again, Phil?' he inquired anxiously.

Only those who have traveled long distances on horseback, and especially in an unknown country, can know what affection a traveler looks upon the companion who has borne him safely through the danger.

Harry felt quite distressed when he saw his mule in so pitiable a condition, and would have given anything to have restored her.

Phil didn't reply to Harry's question at once, but after looking keenly at the animal, said:

"Well, she ain't dead; but that's about all I can say just now."

"It's a wonder she wasn't drowned. I don't suppose the shock would kill her," said Raymond, preparing to take off his clothes, for, like the others, he was wet to the skin.

"The shock!" repeated Harry, curiously. "What could have given a shock? There's no gunpowder in the river; and if there was, it would be no good."

"No," said Raymond, laughing. "But if there isn't gunpowder, there's something almost as powerful. What do you think of electricity?"

"Electricity!" exclaimed Harry, incredulously. "Impossible!"

"Ah," said Phil, with a profound look, "that's one of the cap'n's grand Latin names. It's a better one, though, than some of 'em. Legtricksey ain't bad," he added thoughtfully; "only I should like to see one of the critters, so as I should know 'em again."

Phil evidently had an idea the name meant an animal of some kind, and he did not quite understand what there was in his remark to laugh at.

"Bravo, Phil!—that's very good," exclaimed Raymond, when their merriment had subsided. "I dare say if we look we shall see the very 'Legtricksey' that put us all in such a fright."

He was about to run to the water's edge, when

Phil, who had been attentively watching the insensible mule, called out in a tone of delight:

"She's comin' round, Harry, boy—she's comin' round."

"So she is," replied the lad, running to the animal and stroking its neck.

Yes, Paquita was certainly recovering.

It first moved one leg feebly, then another, and then tried to raise its head.

Both Phil and Harry began to rub its body vigorously, and after this process had been repeated two or three times, the mule opened its eyes and twitched her ears.

"She's all right now," cried Harry, delightedly. "She always twitches her ears like that when she's pleased."

It was surprising how soon Paquita recovered her strength.

She struggled on to her legs, and when she got up Harry could not refrain from throwing his arms round her neck, which mark of affection she acknowledged by rubbing the boy's shoulder gently with her nose.

Raymond was greatly relieved when he saw the mule had quite recovered.

He never thought she would die; still there was a great risk; and to be reduced to two mules would have put him in a serious difficulty.

At the very least it would have delayed his journey, and this would have been awkward, as the hot season was near at hand.

When he saw she had no need of further attention, he called to Harry and Phil to come to the edge of the pool where he was standing. Pointing with his hand, he said:

"There's one of Phil's 'legtrickseya'!"

As its body was about half out of the water, they could see the creature very distinctly.

It was of a dull, blackish-green color, and had a few indistinct stripes at different parts of its body. It was rather thick and heavy-looking, and altogether different to the sinuous form of ordinary eels.

It was lying almost motionless on the water, and might be mistaken for dead.

"You don't mean to say that creature sent me o—" Paquita's back, do you?" exclaimed Harry, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, I do," replied Raymond. "That is the *gymnotus*, or electric eel. It caused all the mischief by swimming under Paquita's body, and touching her with its tail. The effect was just the same as if the whole current of a powerful galvanic battery had passed into the mule; and you had a little touch of it, you know."

"Yes, indeed I did," said Harry, making a wry face; "and it hasn't quite left me yet."

"The eel just now," continued Raymond, "is perfectly harmless. After discharging its electricity, it has to rest a certain time before it collects a sufficient quantity to produce another shock. It was rather singular; but do you know that your mule really went through something like the performance which the Indians engage in when they want to catch these creatures?"

"Why, how was that?" asked Harry.

"Well, the Indians of Guiana, where these eels are most abundant, when they hunt them, get together a quantity of mules and horses, generally wild ones, and drive them into the ponds where they know the eels are. The horses don't like it, I can tell you, and the Indians have to use long sticks to force them into the water. When the horses once get in, there is such a din raised as you can't possibly imagine. Some of the fellows climb into the trees, and yell loud enough to burst themselves; while others surround the pools, and do all they can to prevent the horses escaping."

"But what have the horses got to do with the eels? They can't catch them, can they?" asked Harry.

"No; but don't you see, the eels discharge their electricity. The horses receive shock after shock, some of them fall down senseless, just as Paquita did, and in the hubbub and tumult they are trampled underneath the water by their companions, and so get drowned. Others are only partially stunned, and succeed in scrambling to the shore; and the upshot of the whole affair is that the eels become perfectly helpless, just like that one there, and come to the top of the water, where they are easily killed or captured."

"That must be a lively sort of game," remarked Phil, to whom all the talk about electricity was as intelligible as so much Hebrew would have been.

"Ay, you're right, Phil," exclaimed Captain Raymond, his eyes sparkling at the remembrance of a scene which he had really witnessed. "I never saw anything more fearful than the terror of those horses. Their manes seemed really to stand on end, their eyes implored one to help them, and some even uttered a cry that almost went to one's heart. It was terrible."

"What is the use of the electricity to the eels," asked Harry, "if it leaves them so helpless?"

"Well, that isn't quite known, but it is supposed they numb the fish which they touch, and then it becomes an easy prey."

"I should like to send a bullet through that ugly-looking serpent," observed Phil, in a regretful tone, as he thought of his rifle, wet and useless as it was.

"Well, it would certainly make you a dinner, but I don't think you'd like it as well as lizard's eggs, Phil," replied Raymond.

"What! Is it good to eat?" said Harry.

"Well, it's eatable, but not very nice. The flesh is dry and hard, and I should have to be tolerably sharp-set before I could make a meal from it," returned the captain, slowly making his way back to where he had left the clothes he had taken off.

The party had plenty of work to do for a little while. They had to dry their clothes, clean their rifles and pistols, and examine their baggage.

There was not much of the latter, and most of it consisted of ammunition and tobacco.

They had, however, taken the precaution to tie up

both securely in waterproof coverings, and they were glad to see that the water had not got in.

Their meal that day consisted of fruit. There were cocoanuts, prickly pears, and wild apples in abundance, and as there was no limit to quantity, they did not fare badly.

Harry did not, however, quite recover his strength.

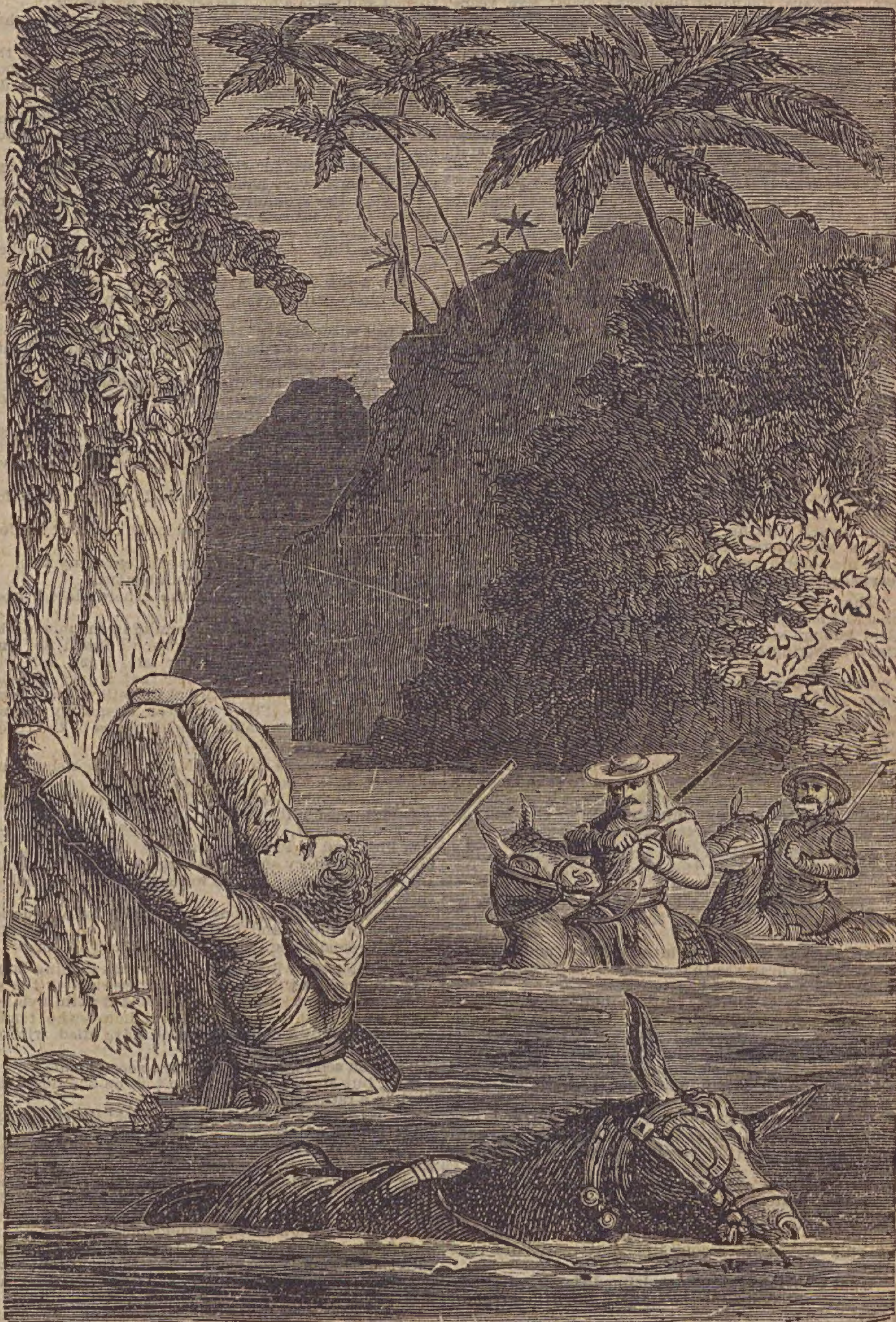
The prickling sensation still remained, though in a slight degree; and as he found he could not endure the jolting of the mule, Captain Raymond resolved to rest for a few hours.

The spot in which they were was most delightful. It appeared to be on the confines of the forest; for, although on one side they were shut in by huge trees and thick undergrowth, yet on the other it was tolerably open.

CHAPTER XI.

SOMETHING ABOUT CAPTAIN RAYMOND AND THE GOLDEN ISLAND.

"I HAVE but little to tell about myself," said Raymond, "and that little will not, I fear, interest you very much. First and foremost I am the youngest son of General Raymond, of Raymond Castle, Norfolk. My father, though tolerably rich, had a large family, and was rather fond of spending his money. The consequence was that when he died he did not leave very much property behind. The castle and the lands went to my eldest brother, while the little money that remained was divided among the other members of the family. With my share (I was twenty-one years old at the time) I bought a lieutenant's commission in the



Suddenly the mule gave a leap into the air, as if it had been shot, and Harry was sent flying over his head.

And what was still better, they had a wide expanse of clear sky to look at—a luxury which they had not enjoyed for the last two or three days.

The turf, too, on which they had stretched themselves, was not the long, rank grass over which they had lately traveled.

It was deliciously soft, and was not long enough to conceal any of those unwelcome visitors, the rattlesnakes.

As they lay reposing, listening to the merry plash of a distant cascade, and watching the mules busily engaged in laying up a store of food, Harry reminded Captain Raymond of his promise made to him that morning.

Raymond looked for a moment at the glorious sunset which was then commencing to pour its gorgeous colors over the sky, and, with something of sadness in his tone, as Harry thought, began his story.

Life Guards, but soon found I had made a mistake. My companions were all rich, and my modest income was not nearly sufficient to enable me to live like them; so after remaining long enough in the regiment to be promoted to a captaincy, I sold out. I was then in a difficulty what to do. I hated being idle, but my education had not fitted me for business, and I could find nothing in England which quite suited me. At last an old friend of my father's offered me an appointment in a merchant's house in Demerara, British Guiana; and eager to see a little life abroad, I accepted it. I was twenty-three when I arrived out at Demerara, and for the first month or two all went well. But somehow or other I grew tired of trade, and longed for something more exciting. I was always fond of adventure, and at the end of six months I threw up my situation, and started off into the interior. I was indifferent as to where I went, so long as there was excitement and change, while a spice of danger was always acceptable.

"Ay, and the more danger the better sometimes, cap'n," said Phil, breaking into Raymond's tale.

"Well, perhaps so," said the latter laughing. At all events, I had as much as any reasonable man ought to want. I have faced death in all manner of ways; I have suffered the horrible pangs of thirst in the burning plains of La Plata, and was nearly buried in an earthquake in Chili, while I have been taken prisoner by the fierce giants of Patagonia, and was thankful to escape with such a slight loss as this."

Raymond held out his right hand as he spoke, and Harry saw that the little finger had been taken off at the top joint.

"Then, how many times I escaped death from drowning and attacks of savage animals I can hardly tell you; but if you knew all the adventures I have been engaged in, you would wonder how it is I am here. Perhaps the worst happened about five years ago in Rio Janeiro. You remember that Phil, don't you?"

"Rather," said Phil. "But you might pass that over, you know, cap'n."

Perhaps it was the setting sun which made Phil's bronzed face take a deeper shade of red; if not Harry would certainly have sworn he was blushing.

"No, no," rejoined Raymond; "I want to tell Harry this, because it's about the bravery of the best and most faithful fellow in the world."

"Come, draw it mild, cap'n," remonstrated Phil.

"I mean what I say," repeated Raymond, "and it isn't a bit too strong;" and he held out his hand to Phil, who shook it heartily with his right fist, while he passed his left across his eyes.

"Listen," said Raymond, resuming. "Five years ago I was in Rio Janeiro, the capital of Brazil, and happened to go into a Spanish gaming-house I was induced to play. Well, somehow or other, I was very lucky and won a large sum of money. Of course there was plenty of drink about, and though I was generally careful in what I took, yet on this occasion I forgot my usual prudence, and I certainly had more than was good for me. The gaming-house was full of Spaniards, some of them passably honest, I dare say, but the greater number as bad a set of murderous rascals as you'd find anywhere."

"Barring the Mexicans," put in Phil.

"Well, perhaps I may make an exception in favor of our Mexican friends," said Raymond. "The excitement or drink, or perhaps both, blinded me, and I found myself making friends with three evil-looking fellows who swore eternal fidelity, and who tried to make me believe they were the most innocent, good-hearted persons in the world or out of it."

"They sadly wanted to see me safe home to my hotel, and I had got a large sum of money about me; but I had enough sense left to reject their kind offer, and after whispering among themselves the three men went away."

"Well, I had a great difficulty in getting out of the house, as they pressed me very much to stay, but at last I succeeded, and set off to my hotel. I had but a quarter of a mile to walk, and commenced at a good round pace; but scarcely had I been in the air a couple of minutes when I felt a swimming in my head and a burning pain in my temples. I began to stagger like a drunken man, but by a tremendous effort I controlled myself, and after resting a minute, against the wall of the house, I felt a little better, and started afresh."

"I at length entered a plaza, or square, which I had to cross before I reached the hotel, which was on the opposite side."

"The moon was shining brightly, and two sides of the square were dark with the shadows cast by the houses."

"All was still as I passed into the plaza, and the only sound I could hear was that of my own footsteps as I tramped over the broad flagstones."

"There was a fountain in the middle of the square the design of which consisted of a group of stone figures."

"One side was in the full glare of the bright moon, and the shadows which these figures cast upon the pavement were so singular that I could not help watching them."

"I was about ten yards from the fountain, and was thinking what droll forms the shadows made, when, to my surprise, I saw the outline of one of the figures move."

"I rubbed my eyes, and thought that it was the disordered state of my brain which had deceived me."

"But no—I had made no mistake; for the outline not only moved the second time, but took a different form."

"What a curious thing!" exclaimed Harry, who was immensely interested in the story. "Whatever could it have been?"

"Well," continued the captain, taking advantage of Harry's interruption to light a fresh pipe. "I knew very well that the moon was not often inclined to dance about; and I was equally certain stone figures couldn't do so either, and so I was forced to come to only one conclusion."

"And what was that?" said Harry, almost breathless with suspense.

"Why that some person had concealed himself behind the fountain."

"The instant the thought flashed across my mind, I thought of the money I had about me, and the bad lot I had just left. 'Tis those three precious scoundrels who wanted to see me home,' I muttered to myself. 'They left before me on purpose to lie in wait. But they've made a mistake for once in their lives; and I put my hand to my belt for my revolver. Judge of my horror when I found it was gone! It had been taken in the gaming-house without my knowing it, and the muddled state of my brain prevented me seeing whether it was in its usual place when I left the house—a precaution which, as a rule, I never neglected."

'Never mind,' I thought; 'I have my sword, and it shall go hard with one of them.' I drew it, and holding it in readiness, I turned on one side so as to avoid the fountain. This upset the reckoning of the villains. They had made up their minds that I must cross the square as the nearest way to get to the hotel; and this, of course, I should have done had I not noticed the shadows. They had no alternative but to come out, and as I passed the fountain I looked out of the corner of my eye and saw them crouching close under the shadow of the basin. 'All right, my friends,' thought I; 'the moon's at my back, and whenever you come after me your shadows will come first, so I'll have fair warning.' This, indeed, was the very thing which happened."

"They hastened softly after me, hoping to take me unawares; but much to their amazement I suddenly turned and made a bold attack with my sword."

"The odds were great, for I found that another had joined them; and here was I one man against four."

"My first lunge passed through the body of the fellow who was nearest to me; for my attack took him so much by surprise that he had not time to defend himself."

"He dropped on the ground, and his companions, wrapping their left arms in their cloaks, rushed upon me."

"They were armed with long Spanish knives, and were evidently very handy with them."

"I kept the scoundrels pretty well at bay, and retreated to the nearest wall as cautiously as I could; for my only fear was of being surrounded."

"While they were in front I felt that I was their match."

"For a few moments the combat was kept up—I gradually withdrawing step by step, they advancing."

"I had succeeded in wounding another slightly, but I found their cloaks defended them to an extent I had not reckoned upon."

"I was afraid of my sword getting entangled, and if so I knew the long blades of my antagonists' knives would descend like lightning."

"Already I had got two severe wounds, and was getting weakened from loss of blood; and, to make matters worse, the Spaniards were separating themselves so as to surround me."

"Summoning all my strength, I made a lunge forward."

"My sword entered the shoulder of one, but my foot slipped and I stumbled."

"As I did so, I felt something cold enter my side."

"It was the knife of villain number two."

"I fell to the ground, and the others closed upon me."

"I could see their blades gleaming in the moonlight, and I gave myself up for lost, when I heard the ringing sound of an English cheer (and I can tell you Harry, it was the sweetest music that I ever listened to), and the next moment two of the fellows were dying right and left as if they had been struck by cannon balls, while the third found himself seized by the throat in a fashion that boded very little good."

"My rescuer was an English sailor, rather short and thick-set, with a beard and moustache."

"I know who it was," shouted Harry, excitedly. "It was Phil, wasn't it?"

"You're right, my lad," returned Raymond. "It was Phil, and to Phil I owe my life that evening. To make a long story short, I struggled to my feet, and the villains seeing that we were the strongest, took to their heels."

"Directly they had gone I fainted from exhaustion and loss of blood, and Phil carried me to the hotel, where I remained six long weeks at death's door."

"Whether the wine I had drunk at the gaming-house was drugged, or whether it was the wounds or the excitement, I don't know, but I was seized with a violent fever, and had it not been for Phil here—who tended me just like any woman—I should have died without doubt."

"So you see Phil saved my life a second time."

"Ay, but Master George, it isn't all on one side," said Phil, in a rather shaky voice.

"What does he call Captain Raymond 'Master George' for?" thought Harry.

"Ye see, Harry," said Phil, "it's all very well what the cap'n's been telling, but there's a summat on the 'per contra,' as they say in the counting-houses. When my father was a poor laborer and had his house burnt down, old General Raymond came forward, like a good-hearted gentleman as he was, and not only built him up a new one, but bought furniture into the bargain. The cap'n here was about nine years old then—wasn't you, cap'n?—and a fine lad you was too."

"Very likely," said the captain, laughing; "and you, Phil, were a strapping lad of fifteen, not very tall for your age, perhaps."

"No," returned Phil, with a chuckle; "I grew t'other way. Well, Harry, d'ye see, Cap'n Raymond was Master George then, and as he took a fancy to me, I used to go in the fields and woods with him pretty much every day. Many times we've been out fishing or birds'-nesting together, and often did we lose our way and frighten the folks at the castle out of their lives—haven't we?"

"Yes, I can swear to the fright," said Raymond. "I have a very lively recollection of the dirty and ragged state I used to get in, and the scoldings it brought."

"After that, when Master George went to Eton, I thought I should like to go to sea, and for ten years I sailed about all parts of the world. It was a surprise, I can tell you, when I found who it was a-fighting with them rascals in Rio. I didn't know, of course, at first, but it wasn't long afore we found each other out, somehow or other. But avast there! this long talk has made me as dry as a ship's biscuit;" and

Phil strolled away, either to get a drink of water, or else to hide his feelings, for, despite his rough appearance, he had a real tender heart.

"And then, did you keep together after that?" inquired Harry, when Phil had gone.

"Yes," replied Raymond. "Phil insisted upon discharging himself from his ship and becoming my servant, but I refused to have anything to do with him unless he traveled with me as my friend; and so at last he consented, and since that night in Rio Janeiro, five years ago, we have been together."

This accounted for much which puzzled the lad. He never could quite make out whether Phil was Raymond's servant or his equal, and now the mystery was solved.

Phil's talk, too, which was sometimes very nautical and sometimes like a landsman, was also explained.

No doubt his companionship with Raymond, who was an educated and well-read man, had removed from him a good deal of the sailor.

"But, Captain Raymond, you haven't told me anything about what I most wanted to hear," said Harry, after a pause.

"I know what you mean. You are thinking of the Golden Island," replied Raymond.

"Yes; that is exactly what I do mean."

"Well, the main reason for my undertaking the journey is that I want to be rich," said Raymond, gravely.

"You want to be rich!" exclaimed the lad. "Why, I shouldn't have thought that, from what you have told me."

"Perhaps not," returned the captain. "There is a cause, but never mind what. You must be satisfied with knowing that I want to be rich, and that I mean to be so."

Harry looked up in surprise.

There was a fierce tone of resolve in his companion's voice which he had never noticed before.

However, he said nothing, but allowed the captain to go on in his own way.

"My intention dates from two years back," continued Raymond, in a softer tone. "I started from England with Phil at that time (for I forgot to tell you that we returned to the old country about two years after our meeting) for the gold fields of California."

"We worked for six months like galley slaves, but met with the worst luck that men could have. At last, our money getting exhausted, we were at our wits' end to know what to do."

"Just about that time an old digger, who had befriended us more than once, fell ill with the fever."

"Everybody deserted him but Phil and myself. We did all we could for him, but he at last died. Before his death he insisted upon my taking his little stock of gold, amounting to a few ounces, and took from under his pillow an old yellow parchment manuscript."

"The gold, he said, was not much, but the book was worth millions."

"I did not pay very much attention to his words, but two or three days after he was buried I took up the manuscript and examined it."

"It was, I found, written by one of the followers of Sir Francis Drake, who made an expedition to Central America in the sixteenth century."

"The writer sets out by asking pardon for the many sins he had committed, and, being in danger of death, wishes to unburden his soul by making a clean breast of everything."

"Was he a Catholic?" asked Harry, who was listening intently to every word uttered by the captain.

"Very likely. At all events, he was a sad rascal by his own showing."

"I needn't repeat to you all he wrote, because it has nothing to do with the extraordinary story he tells of a race of people who, he says, lives on a river which falls into Lake Nicaragua."

"His tale is that some of the followers of Sir Francis Drake mutinied, and Sir Francis left them to their fate."

"They were then south of Lake Nicaragua, and leaving Drake to make his way towards the Pacific, the mutineers, of whom the writer was one, resolved to press on for the Mosquito Coast, on the borders of the Caribbean Sea."

"After being nearly surrounded by the Spaniards, they entered a vast forest, near the southeastern corner of the lake, and attempted to make their way through to the coast."

"But on their way they were taken prisoners by a savage race of people, and were forced to live with them."

"The prisoners submitted to their fate, and afterwards became so reconciled that they settled down and married Indian wives."

"Of this people he gives a most wonderful account, especially of the quantity of gold they were possessed of."

"The sands on each side of the river he represents as half gold, and though I daresay this is a stretch of the long bow, yet it's very likely to have some truth in it."

"But what is more extraordinary than all in the story he tells of an island of gold which is in this river."

"The most annoying part of it is, that just when he begins to describe the situation of the island, the writing suddenly breaks off, and there is nothing but blank parchment."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Harry, his eyes sparkling at the wonderful story he had just heard. "Did you keep the manuscript?" he added.

"Trust me for that," returned Raymond, with a smile.

He undid his belt, and from a pocket inside his hunting dress took out a leathern packet.

He unfolded it, and disclosed the precious manuscript.

Eagerly Harry seized it, and with trembling hands

held it so as to get as much light as possible from the receding sun.

Looking at the bottom of the parchment, and following Raymond's finger, Harry read, in the quaint handwriting of the old buccaneer:

"The seeker after the Golden Island, whereof I spoke, hath a perilous labor in the so-doing. Yet certain shall you find it if"—and here the pale discolored writing ended.

It was very provoking.

Look at it as closely as he might, Harry could decipher nothing else.

At last he said eagerly:

"Isn't it written in invisible ink?"

"I don't think so," returned Raymond quietly. "I have tried every known method for restoring invisible inks, but the parchment shows absolutely nothing. I even got an introduction to a physician in San Francisco, and examined it through a microscope, but with the same result."

Harry folded up the parchment, and returned it to Raymond.

"Then," said he, in a hopeless tone, "I suppose you have given up your plan. The old writer might have been telling lies after all."

"Not at all," returned Raymond. "I believe the old chap was speaking the truth, and if that island is in existence, I'll find it."

He spoke with so much determination and energy that Harry's hopes revived, and seizing Raymond's hand he exclaimed:

"And I'll stick by you, captain, while I have any life left in me."

Raymond knew the lad meant what he said, and he pressed his hand silently.

"Well, and isn't it most time to turn in?" said Phil, who had returned from his stroll, which included the tethering of the mules and the lighting of a fire.

Raymond assented, and the night having come on—for in the tropics there is no twilight—the travelers had their frugal meal and were soon asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

RATTLESNAKES.

For the next two weeks the country presented a very strong contrast to that over which they had been lately traveling.

It was chiefly composed of plains, with here and there a mountain, and occasionally deep, rapid rivers.

They were, in fact, passing through Guatemala, and were rapidly approaching the forest-covered heights of Honduras.

Three months had passed over since they had left Vera Cruz, and they had accomplished more than half their journey; but the most difficult and dangerous part had still to be reached.

They had now an enemy to be feared more than the poisonous serpent or savage beast—the wild and unconquered Indians of Central America—those about whom I told you a little a few chapters back.

Hitherto, however, they had been very fortunate.

They had not seen the trace of an Indian, either in the form of a "trail," or camp, and Raymond hoped they might be able to reach their destination without any such encounters.

He knew, of course, that the task he had set himself was one of great risk, but the risk was more in the journey than in the securing of the treasure—if treasure there was.

If this island existed at all, it would be, he argued to himself, in the midst of ruined houses and temples—buried, perhaps in the heart of a deep forest, but certainly without inhabitants.

No; once let him get to the place hinted at by the old buccaneer, and all danger would be over.

As the party passed through the mahogany forests of Honduras, they were more vigilant in their watch than they had ever been before.

One day it so happened that Harry was some little distance behind the other two, who had just crossed a little stream which ran bubbling through the forest.

On each side were immense mahogany trees, some of them more than eight or ten feet in diameter, and the shade which their great branches threw over the pathway was exceedingly grateful in the heat of the day.

The path over which they were traveling seemed almost to have been made by nature expressly for them.

It was really a grassy avenue, with but little brushwood to stop their progress, although on either side the jungle grew to some three or four feet in height.

Well, as I was saying, Harry was riding along this path perhaps fifty yards in the rear of the others.

He was thinking how delightful the journey was now in comparison to some parts of the toilsome way over which they had passed, when he suddenly heard a rustle in the bushes on his right.

Instantly he was on the alert, and had his rifle in readiness.

"I wonder what this is?" he thought to himself "It isn't like an animal; and I don't believe a snake would make such a noise."

He did not turn his head, but rode on as if he had heard nothing, keeping, however, a sharp lookout from the corner of his eye.

Presently he saw the bushes part, and the face of a dark man appeared above.

The face had something of a negro about it, but had much more intelligence.

The hair, too, was not so curly; and what was still more puzzling, he had on a straw hat!

"Well, I've never heard of a savage Indian wearing a straw hat before," said Harry to himself. "I don't think after all there's much to be afraid of in you."

In spite of this, the lad was much puzzled what to do; for if he appeared afraid, and shouted to his companions the fellow might be emboldened to attack him, seeing he was only a boy.

He resolved upon a bold plan.

Suddenly wheeling his mule to the right, he brought his rifle to his shoulder and aimed at the Indian, without, however, any intention of firing, unless it should be really necessary.

The man, at all events, knew what a rifle was, for his face, which was all Harry could see turned all manner of hues, and, in a mixture of English and Spanish, he besought the lad not to fire.

"Oh, oh! you speak Spanish, do you?" said Harry, joyfully, to himself. "Then I haven't very much to be afraid of."

"Who are you, and what are you doing there?" he called out in Spanish, removing the rifle from his shoulder, but holding it in readiness.

"Me poor Carib, poor mahogany cutter," said the man, with chattering teeth.

"Then come out and show yourself," commanded Harry.

The Indian obeyed and when he stood fairly on the open ground, Harry saw he was not such a bad-looking fellow.

He hadn't got very much clothing on, but he seemed to be very careful of an old boot which he had on one foot.

He was tall and strong, and his skin was a deep brown—something like, in fact, the mahogany which he cut.

Saluting the lad in Indian fashion, he held out something in his hand which he presented in token of friendship.

Harry took it and found it to be a lump of brown sugar, weighing about half a pound, and wrapped in a plantain-leaf.

"The sugar-cane, you must know, grows wild in Honduras, and is extracted in a rough form by the Indians, who eat it with their tortillas greedily."

Telling the Indian to follow him, Harry rode on and shouted to his companions in front.

At the sound of his voice they turned quickly, and looked very much surprised to see that the lad had got a companion.

"Hello!" cried Phil, who have you got there, Harry?"

"He's a Carib," called out Harry. "He's not a bad fellow. See—he's brought us some sugar;" and he held out the lump in his hand.

Raymond was not at all sorry to hear Harry had made the acquaintance of the Carib, because he thought it was very likely the Indian could tell him something about the country.

Giving him a small present, he began to ask him some questions—how far it was to Lake Nicaragua, what sort of country they had to pass through, were the inhabitants peaceable, and the like.

He found from the Indian's answers, that they were near the river Ulloa, and close to the great plain of Comayagua, which is right in the center of Honduras, at a considerable height above the level of the sea.

They were still about two hundred and fifty miles from the most northern part of the lake, but as for the people, the Carib could say very little about them.

The Carib himself seemed very peaceable, and was a fortunate acquaintance, for he pointed out many roots and plants which he said were good to eat, and which they found was indeed the case.

He was one of a race who inhabit the northern coast of Honduras.

Originally the Caribs lived on the Islands of Antillis, which form part of the West Indian group; but nearly a century ago they were removed by the English to the desert island of Roatan, in the Bay of Honduras, whence they spread themselves over the northern parts of the coast of the mainland.

They are divided into two races—the black and the yellow Caribs.

The black Caribs are those who have negro blood in their veins, while the yellow are those who have remained pure.

Harry's friend was one of the former, and like all his brethren, was very fond of finery, which accounted for his straw hat, and old boot, which he picked up somehow.

The Indian asked Raymond cautiously if he were looking after mahogany, and when Raymond said he was not, the man seemed immensely relieved; and indeed he had reason to be so.

From what the Carib said, and from what Raymond knew about mahogany cutting, the latter found out that the Indian was what is called a "hunter," not of animals, but of mahogany trees.

The duty of the mahogany hunter is to seek out those places in the forest where the trees are most plentiful.

To do this he has to be as cautious as if he were tracking a wild beast, because he wants to keep all the advantages of the discovery to himself.

He has a good many rivals, who are also seeking the same thing, and many a trick and stratagem does each one resort to in order to deceive his brethren.

The first thing the hunter has to do is to cut his way through the bush to the top or slope of a hill.

He then selects the tallest tree he can find, and climbs to the top.

When he arrives there he surveys the country, and soon marks a spot where the mahogany seems most abundant.

This is not such a difficult task as one may suppose, because in August and September, when the hunter begins his work, the leaves of the mahogany turn a yellowish brown color, and anyone used to the work can easily tell the spot where the trees are.

When the hunter discovers such a place he descends the tree, and makes his way directly to it; and though he has nothing but his own observation and recollection to guide him, he very rarely misses his way.

The cutting of the trees is done by gangs of negroes and Indians, who set to work immediately the trees have been discovered by the hunter.

They cut the tree about ten or eleven feet from the

ground, and the trunks are afterwards sawn into logs of different lengths.

When they have got a sufficient quantity of wood, they make a rough kind of road down to the nearest river, and the logs are placed upon trucks and dragged down to the water, on which they float to their destination.

The Carib traveled with them several hours, and then bade them adieu—not, however, before he received a present of a pocket-knife, with which he was greatly delighted.

On the day after the Carib left them, they reached, as they supposed, the River Ulloa, but to their great dismay they found it so wide and so deep, and the current so rapid, that it was quite impossible to cross.

Phil, however, would insist upon trying, but he had not got more than a yard before he saw he could not proceed any further.

The bed of the river was filled with huge stones, and had the depth not been so great, the holes between these stones would have made the crossing very dangerous.

"What are you going to do now, cap'n?" asked Phil, as the three watched the angry waters rushing at a terrific rate past them, carrying branches and roots of trees away as if they had been feathers.

"Well, we can't cross here—that's very certain," returned Raymond.

"Can't we make a boat?" suggested Harry.

"Well, we could make a *pipan* if we had got a cedar-tree, but we haven't got one, unfortunately," said the captain.

The *pipan* is a flat-bottomed canoe, made by hollowing out the trunk of a cedar-tree, and then shaping it at both sides.

"Suppose we ride along the bank a little way?" said Phil. "We might find an easier spot to cross."

This was agreed to, and the party turned to the right, and rode a quarter of a mile by the side of the river.

They found the banks grew steeper as they advanced, and the river narrower, until, when they had got a mile, the water seemed to run quite within a ravine.

On each side the rocky banks rose at least twenty feet, and the river being here so much narrower, the current increased in swiftness, and the water rushed along with tremendous speed.

It was a wild, romantic scene.

Sloping down the banks to the river's edge grew ferns of every variety and form, kept constantly wet from the spray which dashed over them from the bounding waters.

The rapid current had gradually worn away the rocks at either side, and the banks overhung the river—being, in fact, several feet nearer to each other at the top than at the bottom.

At this part the riding became rather rough, and the travelers dismounted and, going cautiously to the edge of the ravine, looked down on the boiling river beneath.

"What a dreadful roar it makes!" said Harry, after a pause.

"Ah," returned Phil, "you might say good-bye to your friends if you once got in there."

"There's only one way of getting across," said Raymond, after measuring the width of the chasm with his eye, "and that is by making a bridge."

"You've hit it, cap'n," said Phil, with an approving nod. "A bridge it must be, and nothing short."

Along the edges of the ravine grew some tolerably tall saplings, and Raymond saw the soil in which they had taken root was of a loose sandy nature. It occurred to him that by tying a rope round the most suitable they might be able to tear them up. If so, their labor would be saved immensely; for they had only one little ax with them, and to cut down trees even of small size would take a long time.

As near as he could guess, he reckoned the opening of the chasm about ten feet; consequently, if he could get a sufficient number of trees about fifteen or sixteen feet long, he would be able to make a bridge strong enough to allow the mules to pass over.

Phil highly approved of this idea, and he soon had his lasso round a tall pine sapling.

Exerting all their strength they found they could tear it up by the roots, exactly as Raymond had said.

Having got the first down successfully, they attacked a second.

This, however, was an older one and the roots seemed to be firm in the ground.

Giving a mighty pull, the loose earth parted, and half of the roots came up, leaving the tree bending over at an angle of about forty-five degrees.

Forgetting the strain which the tree was exerting upon the rope, Raymond suddenly let go his hold of the latter and sprang up at the branch, thinking by his weight and strength to bear the tree to the ground.

He was mistaken.

The tree, released from the pressure, flew back, with Raymond clinging to its branches, and nearly tearing the skin off the hands of Phil and Harry, who vainly strove to keep their grasp upon the rope secure.

Looking up in horror, they saw their companion clutching the tree and suspended over the opening of the chasm.

There was a sound of falling stone and gravel.

The tree swayed for an instant to and fro, and then tottered and fell, carrying Raymond with it.

Scarcely daring to look—for they expected to see the captain hurled into the river—they rushed blindly forward; but as they did so, they heard a shout which sounded to them from within the chasm in front.

They hesitated and gazed at each other for a moment in bewilderment; for they heard Raymond's voice again shout in clear, round tones:

"For heaven's sake, mind yourselves! We have unearthed a nest of rattlesnakes!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A WHIRLPOOL IN THE RIVER.

A NEST OF RATTLESNAKES!

These words, so full of meaning, caused Harry and Phil instinctively to recoil.

For a moment they forgot Raymond's perilous position; indeed, it seemed quite natural he should warn them of their danger, and it was only after the first impulse of self-preservation had passed that they recalled the event which had just happened.

The next instant, however, they ran forward, and at once understood the perilous situation of Raymond.

They saw that nothing short of a miracle had saved his life.

The tree, but half-torn from the soil, had still part of its roots buried in the ground; the other end lay on the opposite side of the chasm, over which it extended four or five feet.

Raymond was still clinging to the trunk, for with extraordinary presence of mind, directly he felt the tree falling, he had lowered himself with the intention of jumping to the ground.

He was too late for that, however, but he saved himself from being dashed to the opposite side, as the splintered bough which he had first clutched showed he would have been.

But he was not yet out of danger.

Coiled on the trunk, and rearing its poisonous head, was a large rattlesnake, the rattle of whose tail was sending forth a low, hideous sound which, almost inaudible though it was, made the flesh creep.

Its body was quivering its entire length, the head was drawn back as if to survey its enemy, its eyes were gleaming fiercely, its cheeks were puffed out to an enormous size, the lips were tightened over its venomous fang, while a horrid-looking tongue was stretched out beyond its jaws as if in expectation of its prey.

Raymond knew his peril, but his nerves were not shaken.

He could see at once that he must depend upon his companions for assistance.

As for himself, he was quite helpless, and the least movement would only hasten the fatal spring of the reptile.

In that fearful moment, however, he never lost his coolness.

In a low whisper, which was distinctly heard by the others, he said:

"Look sharp, Phil; a quarter of a minute'll be too late."

The rattlesnake, he was aware, is very slow in its movement in comparison with other snakes, and on that he rested for his escape.

Directly Phil caught sight of the snake his rifle was at his shoulder, and was leveled.

It was not a moment too soon, for the venomous creature was tightening its coils, and was in the act of springing.

The sharp ring of Phil's rifle sounded through the forest, and the moment after Harry uttered an exclamation of horror, for he saw the bullet had missed.

Suddenly unfolding itself, the rattlesnake gave a bound towards Raymond, who, letting go his hold of the tree, dropped sheer down a depth of twenty feet into the struggling river below.

"Help! help! Phil, for heaven's sake!" cried Harry, clasping his hands in an agony of terror, and rushing to the edge of the chasm.

With agitated breast he looked down, but to his grief could see nothing through the cloud of spray which the torrent of water leaping from the rock sent up.

With a face full of anxiety, Phil rushed to Harry's side.

"Curses on my cowardness!" he cried, bitterly.

"To think I should have missed the varmint!"

"Do you think the captain's drowned?" whispered Harry, clutching Phil's arm excitedly.

The poor fellow, who seemed overcome with grief, shook his head despairingly, and began reproaching himself as being the cause of all the mishap.

"Can't we do anything to save him?" exclaimed Harry, to whom the suspense was horrible.

"Look at those rocks, Harry," cried Phil, "do you think any mortal could fall down there, and not be crushed? No, no; all we can do is to search for the poor fellow's body."

Harry could but own that Phil was right. It was indeed absurd to suppose anybody could fall into that frightful chasm and escape alive.

And yet the lad was loth to give up so easily; he had great faith in Captain Raymond's strength and adroitness, and knew, if there was a chance at all, he would avail himself of it.

"Come," said he to Phil, "let us do what we can, at all events. Who knows but what we may find him alive after all."

Phil gave another sad shake of his head, but followed Harry, who had commenced to run along the edge of the ravine in the direction of the current.

He knew Raymond, either alive or dead, would be carried along by the force of the current, and his hope was that the captain had found some rock or other to which he could cling, and prevent himself from being swept away and drowned.

The banks, as they advanced, grew farther apart and less in height.

The current, too, was not so swift, but still quite rapid enough.

About twenty yards ahead the river took a sharp turn, caused by an immense rock which stood some fifteen feet out of the water.

Round the edge of this rock the river was forced to bend, and the continual dashing against the hard stone and rebounding had made quite a hole low in the soft bank on its right. In this hollow or bay was a miniature whirlpool, formed by the main current as it came down opposing the water forced back by the rock.

Here the river was eddying and whirling in a way which almost made one dizzy to look at. The roar of the waves as they dashed and broke against the rock was deafening, while there was a white foam upon the surface which told of the tumult going on beneath.

"Phil!" cried Harry, who had been looking steadfastly at this whirlpool for the last three minutes, "what is that?"

Phil followed Harry's finger, and saw a black object just above the surface of the water. It was close to the rock, and seemed to be stationary. Every now and then the water would bury it, and be lost to sight; but in a few moments it would reappear.

"By George, Harry!" he exclaimed, his breath coming thick and fast, "it looks like the figure-head of a man!"

"That's just what I thought! Let us look sharp, Phil. Quick, man! Oh, if it should be the captain!"

"Dead or alive, we'll have him out," said Phil, as he started into a run.

In a few seconds they had arrived opposite to the bend, and looked anxiously across to where the water was twisting and twirling with dreadful rapidity. With hearts beating wildly they shouted out as if moved by one impulse:

"Is that you captain?"

Yes, there could be no doubt it was a man who was clinging to the rock, and against whose body the torrent of water was beating so fiercely. Was he alive?

That was the question they had got to decide.

They could not see his arms for the spray and mist, and it might be that the mere force of the water kept him, though he were dead, in that position.

Phil looked at Harry with dismay and trouble, and Harry returned the gaze.

"What could he do?" each thought to himself.

Here they were on one side, and their friends on the other, with a deep and rapid river between them.

To swim across was impossible, and yet there was no other means.

While they were debating, a faint sound seemed to come across the water.

It was only heard for a moment, and then was buried in the terrific roar of the river.

"Hark!" exclaimed Harry. "Did you hear that?"

"Ay," returned Phil. "Was it his voice, d'ye think?"

"Let's shout. Perhaps he'll answer it," said the lad.

The two shouted as loud as they could, and then waited for the reply. How intently they listened you may well imagine.

Was it fancy or reality? A sound certainly reached them, but whether a human voice or no, they were unable to decide.

They looked at each other in silence.

"Well," said Phil at last, "this won't do at any price. We must get at him somehow. Look ye here; there's only one way as I can think of."

"What is it, Phil?" cried Harry, pale with excitement. "Make haste, for heaven's sake."

"It's this. There's that tree which did all the mischief—laying across the river higher up. We can cross by that, take our lassos and get to yon rock, and then one of us must go down—d'ye see?"

Phil spoke rapidly and with suppressed breath. Harry understood him instantly, and he saw there was a chance if they could but reach the spot in time.

"Can he last out until we get round?" whispered the lad.

"We must try. It's our only chance. Come, my boy; let's see who'll get there first."

Away they sped up and down the uneven ground, forcing their way through the bushes, and heedless of the scratches which their hands and faces received.

Panting and out of breath, they reached the rough bridge formed by the tree.

"Mind how you go!" gasped Phil, as Harry dashed across the trunk in a dreadfully reckless fashion.

They forgot all about the rattlesnake in their hurry and excitement. Fortunately it had glided off, and they suffered no harm on this score.

Both got safely to the other side.

Now for the rope. To untie it from the topmast boughs was but a moment's work.

Then came another scamper along the river's bank.

How they ran! What mattered it when Harry's foot slipped and he went tumbling head over heels almost into the river.

He was up again instantly, never heeding an ugly bruise on his head.

What cared Phil—for he was none of the slimmest—for a dreadful pain in his side?

Nothing.

He never slackened his pace, and, stout as he was, almost kept up with his companion. Away they dashed helter-skelter, and in an amazingly short space of time, considering the difficult path, arrived breathless on the summit of the huge rock.

Now was the moment of excitement. Were they in time? Had Raymond been able to hold out so long? They scarcely dared to look over the edge, fearful lest their forebodings should be fulfilled.

But no time must be lost.

Crawling to the very brink, they gazed into the whirling water below.

Is he still there?

Another rapid anxious glance, and Phil murmured:

"Thank God, we're in time!"

Yes, they could distinguish the dark curly hair of the captain, and could even see that his arms still clasped a huge boulder in a way that only a live man could have done.

"Keep hold, captain!" almost screamed Harry with delight. "Hurrah! hurrah!" and the lad leaped to his feet.

Raymond had heard their voices evidently, for he looked up; but either his voice was weak, or the roar of the waters buried the sound, for they heard nothing.

But now to the rescue.

Phil had already set to work, and had in a twinkling

tied one end of the rope round the trunk of the tree, which some fierce storm had blown down within two or three feet of the edge of the rock.

"Will it be long enough?" inquired Harry, in an anxious tone.

"That's just what I'm going to see," replied Phil, throwing the other end of the rope over the rock.

"Hurrah!—long enough and to spare," he shouted, seeing it disappear beneath the surface of the water. Then the next instant he struck his forehead with his clenched hand, and with a bitter groan, cried: "See there, Harry! All we've done ain't any good. He's too far off!"

Phil was right.

The stone which Raymond was grasping was some six or seven feet from the side of the rock upon which the two were standing, and the rope was at least two or three feet too short.

While racking his brains for some way to overcome the difficulty, Harry noticed that Raymond was on the very edge of the waterpool, and that the twigs and logs which were carried past him occasionally came round again to the same spot.

The lesson was not lost.

"Your axe, Phil—quick!" he shouted, darting to the trunk, and pulling with might and main at a bough.

"What for?" demanded Phil, in bewilderment; for he did not understand what the lad was going to do.

"Never mind. Help me to get off this bough," cried Harry.

Phil saw there was method in the lad's madness, and without more ado went to work manfully, and between them they soon wrenched off a good-sized branch.

"Now to haul up the rope," cried Harry, suiting the action to the word.

Quickly was it pulled up, and as quickly one end secured to the branch.

Then over it went again, and to Harry's joy he saw that the rope was long enough to allow it to float on the water.

It moved a little—first slowly, then quicker; and by-and-bye, as Harry anticipated, it spun round in the center of the whirlpool.

Nearer and nearer it came to the edge at every turn, and now Phil saw what Harry's idea was. In another turn or two it would be carried near enough for Raymond to seize it.

The latter, meanwhile, had watched the proceeding with anxiety.

He saw what was intended by the lowering of the bough, and seizing his opportunity, just as it was borne towards him, he let go his hold of the stone, and clutched the branch with a grasp which told he had not lost all his strength.

Another moment, he was swinging in the air free of water.

Yet another moment and he was being pulled over the edge of the rock by his companions, who were almost beside themselves with delight at this unlooked-for deliverance.

CHAPTER XIV.

PHIL MEETS SOME FRIENDS.

STRONG and enduring as Raymond was, his strength was almost exhausted by the time he was fairly on the rock.

But a man who leads such a life as our travelers had during the last three months, soon recovers himself, and five minutes afterwards Raymond was shaking himself free from the water, like some great Newfoundland dog.

"You've had a sharp turn, cap'n," said Phil. "Better be half-drowned than bitten by one of those darned rattlesnakes, though, after all."

"Ay, you're right, Phil. As long as you keep to the half, I quite agree with you," said Raymond, shrugging his shoulders; "but it was a tough job. It was as much as I could do to hang on to that rock. Phew! I don't think I shall get the use of my arm back for a day or two."

Slowly they sauntered back with the rope to their tree bridge, Raymond leaving the greater part of his clothes spread out to dry on the surface of a huge rock.

"We shall have our work to do to get the mules across," said Harry, as they neared the tree. "Paquita's as skittish as a young kitten, and the others are not much better."

"Oh, we've only got to cut down a tree or two more," said Phil. "Wherever a man can walk I'll back a mule to follow."

Phil was the first to run across the narrow bridge to the other side of the ravine.

He hastened to the spot where he had left the mules grazing, but soon came running back to his companions, looking rather troubled in his mind.

"I say, cap'n," he shouted, "here's a pretty mess. Those blessed mules have given us the slip, and gone off somewhere on their own account."

It was true.

They had not been tethered, the travelers not thinking it necessary, as they were about to cross the river.

Raymond's accident had, however, caused them to forget them, and the consequence was that they took advantage of their masters' absence to go off on an excursion.

"What's to be done?" said Harry, with a blank look.

"We shall surely never find them in this wild place."

"I'm not so sure about that," returned Raymond.

"The trail will be easy enough to follow. The only annoying part is the loss of time."

After talking over the matter, it was decided Phil should start by himself in search of the mules, while Raymond and Harry should stay behind.

Of course they could not think of proceeding any further until they had caught the animals, so they resolved to camp for the night on that side of the river.

Phil did not have much difficulty in finding out which way the mules had gone.

The marks of their hoofs were quite sufficient, and he had no doubt he should come across them before an hour had passed.

At first the hoof-marks were very deep, for the ground was marshy and soft; but after making his way through a thicket, he found they grew more and more indistinct, from the fact that the ground was much harder.

Phil now had need of all his experience as a hunter to enable him to follow the trail correctly.

To any one unaccustomed to the work it would have been impossible, but Phil had no hesitation which way to go.

A leaf half embedded in the ground, a broken twig, and the appearance of the bushes, were to the hunter sufficient signs to guide him.

After proceeding about an hour he began to be very much puzzled that he did not overtake the animals.

At first he thought he had missed the trail, but on careful examination he decided that they were still ahead, and again he pushed on.

The way led him down a slight hill, at the bottom of which ran a little stream.

He hastened down, for he felt sure that if they had crossed, some signs would be still apparent.

He had no need to look very far, for the broken reeds and the grass, which were trodden down in every direction, told their own tale.

While examining the footprints he suddenly became very much excited, and bending down to the ground, looked closely at two of the marks.

Then he got up and rubbed his eyes, and then gave a second look.

"Well, I'm blessed!" he ejaculated at last. "This is almost the curiousest thing as I've seen for a long time. If it wasn't impossible, I should say that mark was made by an English shoe."

Then he went on a little further, and again examined the ground.

He found some footprints much plainer than any he had yet seen.

There was the impression of a heel, the little hole made by the toe in walking, and even the nails in the soles.

Phil now could no longer doubt.

The marks were certainly made by European shoes, and the idea that some of his countrymen (for he had made up his mind they were English) had passed over the ground on which he was standing, and were possibly within a few minutes walking distance of him, was so astounding that for some moments he stood staring fixedly at the foot-marks without moving.

At length, giving a shake to his head, he muttered to himself;

"There's only one thing I don't quite like. Whoever they are, they've got our mules; or else they've missed this place nigh about the same time."

On looking closely and comparing the marks made by the mules and those made by the men, he saw that they were of equal freshness.

The soil was still moist, and neither the one nor the other could have more than half an hour's start of him.

It might happen that the marks were those of Carib Indians, whose delight in any kind of dress, as I have before mentioned, is well known.

The Carib whom they had already met had an old boot on one foot, and who could tell, but that some of his companions had not followed his example? However there was one thing that did not quite bear out this view; the marks were cleanly and crisply made, and the shoes, whoever they belonged to, were evidently not very old, and therefore not likely to be in the possession of Indians.

At any rate, he felt it necessary to be cautious, and he took care as he went along to keep a sharp look-out on both sides.

The trail for some distance continued down the banks of the stream, and then turned off over some marshy ground towards a forest.

It was then very near sunset, and the whole western sky was a gorgeous red, while clouds of purple mist hung over the distant mountains.

It was a beautiful sight, but Phil was in no humor to enjoy it for he had expected to have rejoined Raymond before night, and this he knew was now impossible to do.

Darkness rapidly approached.

The snipes and cranes, multitudes of which he had passed on his journey, were no longer to be seen; the hoarse screaming of the parrots was silenced, and the solitude and stillness of the place became almost oppressive.

At the edge of the forest he stopped and decided to camp for the night.

It was useless to go on for fear of losing the trail; so, casting his rifle down, he began to search for some wood to make a fire.

He did not feel very comfortable, for he was terribly hungry.

In the hurry and excitement he had forgotten to provide himself with any food, and, intent upon finding the mules, he had neglected to shoot any birds, which he could easily have done.

However, he made the best of his difficulties, knowing that in sleep he would forget them all.

He had selected a capital spot for the night.

It was well sheltered under the wide-spreading branches of a gigantic cotton-tree, and here he spread his serape in readiness.

In collecting wood for the fire he had wandered some little distance from the tree, and was about to return, when he was startled by seeing a bright light, as it seemed to him, in the very heart of the forest.

After looking at it for a moment he had no doubt it came from an encampment; and, hurrying back for his

rifle, he determined at all hazards to set his mind at rest.

Stealthily creeping through the bushes, sometimes crawling on his hands and knees, at others almost lying on the ground, he slowly made his way towards the light.

Soon he could see a dark shadow flitting about, and then he heard, or fancied he heard, the sound of voices.

He was perhaps some twenty yards from the fire, and on a piece of ground destitute of bushes.

He had risen to his feet, and was cautiously walking, keeping his eyes fixed on the fire.

Suddenly he felt his foot catch in something. He put his hands out to save himself; but it was no use.

He stumbled and fell heavily to the ground.

In falling, his rifle, which he carried fully cocked so

"I'm blest, Jack, if we ain't caught a big bird this time! Git up, you son of a marlinpike, and lets overhaul your figurehead!"

"Ay, ay, messmate," said Phil, just as if he had been on board ship.

You should have seen the astonishment of the men when they heard Phil answer.

They let go their hold, and could only find vent to their feelings in a little hard swearing.

Phil by this time had risen to his feet, and picking up his empty rifle, said:

"Give us your fists, my hearties. I know an English sailor's voice when I hear it."

There was something in Phil's tone which smacked so much of friendship, that the men naturally held out their hands and shook his heartily.



"For Heaven's sake, mind yourselves! We have unearthed a nest of rattlesnakes!"

as to be in readiness, went off, and awoke the echoes far and wide.

In an instant there was a commotion through the forest; the monkeys woke up and chattered their surprise at the strange noise which had awakened them; startled birds, frightened from their sleep, darted through the air, and the fluttering of their wings had a strange unearthly sound; while there was a peculiar plunging and stamping of feet but a few yards off, which could come only from horses or mules.

Phil did not lose his presence of mind; but before he could rise to his feet, the bushes in front of him parted, and two light and active fellows sprang out and seized him on either side.

Even in the excitement of the moment, Phil could see that his captors were not Indians; but whether English, Spanish, French, or Dutch, he could not say.

To his great relief, he heard one of the men say in good English:

"Well," said the man called Jack, "I don't know who you are or how you came here, but if you want a helping hand, here's mine and welcome. What's all the row, eh?"

Phil explained that his foot had stumbled over something, and that in falling his gun had gone off by accident.

"Ay, it's the rope o' them mules as we found to-day roaming about by themselves. Maybe you know summat about 'em?"

"Well, seeing as I've come expressly to look after 'em, maybe I do," returned Phil. "Holloa, Paquita!" he cried; for they had been approaching the fire as they talked, and came in full sight of the three mules, who were tethered by a long rope, over which Phil had stumbled. "You ungrateful brute," he continued shaking his fist reproachfully, while Paquita kicked up her heels in token of repentance.

The men, Phil soon saw by the firelight, were English sailors; and they seemed honest fellows enough.

They had found the mules, they said, straying about, and as there were no signs of any master, they thought they could do no better than take care of them. But they were glad they had found the owner; and the tone in which they said it told Phil they were in earnest.

Soon the three were seated comfortably round the fire, on the top of which a monkey was being roasted.

It looked remarkably like a small baby, but it proved to our hungry travelers very delicious, and Phil, who had been without food since the morning, made a hearty supper.

CHAPTER XV.

A MYSTERIOUS DISCOVERY.

Phil and the two sailors rapidly became fast friends; and indeed their strange meeting in the midst of an unknown country was sufficient to make them so. It was certainly puzzling to Phil that they should meet each other in such a wild spot; but Jack soon explained the mystery.

They had, it appeared, belonged to an English ship, which had come to Omoa, a port at the southwestern corner of the Bay of Honduras, for the purpose of taking a cargo of mahogany.

The two men had heard strange tales of the amount of gold which was contained in the rivers of Central America; and filled with all kinds of wild ideas, they had secretly left the ship, and had been wandering about the country for the last six months.

They were heartily sorry they had come, for they had found but little gold; and they were making their way as fast as they could to the coast, where they hoped at some time or other to reach a seaport.

They had at first gone through great privations, as they were armed only with muskets, and were but in different marksmen; but necessity had sharpened their wits and improved their aim, and latterly they had fared better.

Then Phil asked the men if they would like to join their party.

He did not think it prudent to tell the real object of their journey, but merely said they were engaged in a mission for the American Government.

The men were only too glad to meet and talk with a fellow-countryman, and were not very particular what service they entered into, so they thankfully accepted Phil's proposal.

The next morning they started on the road back.

Phil had been careful to make plenty of landmarks in his search after the mules for fear a storm of rain, and they had no difficulty in keeping to the path.

About mid-day they arrived at the spot where he had left Captain Raymond and Harry; and right glad were the latter to see them.

Phil soon told the events which we already know, and introduced the two sailors to the captain.

The latter was more pleased to see them than he owned; for he had, while Phil was away, come across certain signs which rather troubled him as to their future progress. However, he said nothing about this, but issued orders for the party to cross the river as soon as possible.

With the addition they had received to their strength, there was no difficulty in cutting down sufficient to make a bridge safe enough for mules to cross.

In about an hour's time they were safely on the other side.

They afterwards found that what they had taken to be the River Ulloa was but a branch of the main stream. They discovered the latter running due north and south through the great plain of Comayagua, and Raymond was determined to keep along the banks.

As they no longer had mules sufficient to carry all the party, they placed all their baggage on the back of one, and took it in turns to ride the other two.

Their custom was to travel very early in the morning, and to rest in the mid-day when the sun was hottest, and then to continue their journey towards evening.

Very frequently, while Phil and the sailors were enjoying their mid-day siesta, Captain Raymond and Harry would wander together about the lovely spots which they made halting-places. Sometimes it was on the banks of the river, at others it would be at some beautifully wooded grove, where the cocoa-palms threw their grateful shade, and where they slaked their thirst with the juice of the bananas and prickly pear. But wherever they went they found new objects to examine, and neither Harry nor Raymond ever lost interest in the wondrous creations which Nature has scattered with so lavish a hand in tropical America.

Of course the great object of their journey—the discovery of the mysterious Golden Island—often formed part of their conversation.

They liked to let their imaginations wander unchecked, and many a speculation had they over this fascinating subject.

One day the two were taking, as usual, a short excursion, while the others were smoking and chatting.

Raymond had been speaking about the ancient Mexicans—whose descendants Cortez found in the magnificent city which he so ruthlessly plundered.

Whence they had sprung no man could say—where they had gone was hidden from human knowledge.

That they had existed for hundreds of years before their first discovery by the Spaniards, was evident from the magnificence of their dwellings and their acquaintance with useful arts.

Doubtless many a city, perhaps as extensive and as magnificent as Mexico, was scattered over Central America; but how it was that they had become so suddenly blotted out of being, was a problem which Raymond, at all events, could not solve.

The spot in which the two were conversing was wild and romantic.

From a cascade some twenty or thirty feet high the water came rushing and tumbling into a pool below, whence, over a natural weir formed by a fallen tree, it made its way to the river.

Growing in between the moss-covered rocks were lovely ferns, while here and there were curiously-shaped orchids, some of them so eccentric in their shape, that for a few minutes Harry could hardly believe they were plants.

On each side towered stately cotton and majestic cedar and mahogany trees; while a network of luxuriant creepers clung lovingly to the trunks and hung down in wild elegance, their beautiful flowers peeping at intervals from among the bright green leaves.

The two companions had sat down on a mossy bank, and were gazing at the lovely scene around them, when Harry all at once directed Raymond's attention to an opening between two trees on their left hand.

"What is that singular thing?" he asked. "It looks like a tree, but I never saw a tree of that color before."

"You're right; it is singular. We must certainly have a closer inspection," returned Raymond, springing to his feet.

They pushed the bushes on one side, and reached the opening noticed by Harry.

Extending some thirty feet out of the ground was a huge carved monument, about six feet in diameter. Its form was circular, and on the sides were sculptured figures of monstrous size and frightful ugliness. Surrounding the figures were various barbarous devices, while in certain parts there appeared to be inscriptions. The whole was covered with moss, and the lower part was completely buried in vegetation.

"What can be the meaning of this monument?" exclaimed Harry, examining it wonderingly.

"Who can tell?" returned Raymond. "It has its meaning, doubtless; but the key to it is not in our possession, at all events."

They walked round the column, and on the other side they discovered what seemed to them to be an altar. It was simply a mound about six feet high, and standing within a circle of large stones. Lying on the ground, at various distances, were broken statues, overgrown with moss and half covered with earth. The features of most of these were disfigured by time, and some could not be distinguished at all; but one or two of the most perfect made Harry shudder at their repulsive ugliness.

"Most likely we have come upon the remains of an ancient temple," observed Raymond, after inspecting the ruins more closely.

He was standing at a little distance from the mound, which he took to be an altar, and as he spoke he walked towards it for the purpose of making a more careful examination.

To his surprise, he saw some smoke issuing from the top.

Curious to know the reason of this, he advanced close to the mound, and standing on tiptoe, he looked over the edge.

At that moment he heard a loud exclamation from Harry, and he suddenly turned his head.

Fortunately for him was it that he did so, for his movement saved his life.

Within an inch of his head whizzed an arrow which clove the air with a hissing sound, and buried itself full three inches in the trunk of a tree opposite.

In an instant he drew his revolver, but could see no one.

Meanwhile, Harry had dashed to the other side of the column, and Raymond heard the report of his pistol; but the moment after the lad reappeared.

"He went that way!" he panted, stretching out his hand as he spoke.

"Who?" demanded Raymond.

"The Indian!" returned the lad, excitedly. "I only saw him for an instant, and then he disappeared."

The two looked at each other in bewilderment; for the arrow had been shot so noiselessly and so mysteriously that there really seemed something magical about it.

"It's of no use looking," returned Raymond, in answer to Harry's proposal that they should search the spot. "There may be others—who can tell? No; our best course is to get back as soon as possible to the men. I am not surprised, although I ought to have been a little more cautious."

"Why, have you seen any Indians before?" returned Harry.

"Well, I said nothing to you about it," replied Raymond; "but while Phil was gone to search for the mules, I came across the remains of a camp-fire which I was certain had been lit by Indian hands. The ashes were just as they had left them, and the wind had scarcely had time to blow the lighted particles away, so that I knew the fire must have been burning pretty recently. Of course I could not tell whether they were of a peaceable race or not; but that pretty little weapon over yonder is a hint I shan't forget, you may depend upon it."

Meanwhile the other men, aroused by Harry's shot, came running up to see what was the matter.

"The matter is this, my friends," said Raymond, pointing to the arrow in the tree, "that we are in the midst of a dangerous people, and that we shall have to be very careful lest we come to grief. Now, the best thing we can do is to look well to our arms, and push on as quick as possible."

A short consultation was held, and every man having carefully examined his weapon, the party started afresh.

Neither on that afternoon nor on the following day did anything happen, although once or twice Harry fancied he detected a slight rustling in the bushes which did not appear quite natural. However, they

saw nothing, and concluded that the noise was made by some animal.

The next day they entered upon totally different scenery. The ground commenced to be broken up, and was covered with a kind of lava which made traveling exceedingly difficult. They were, in fact, approaching a volcano, which, at some time or other, had poured out torrents of burning stone, and had scorched the country round for many a mile. The volcano had doubtless been quiet for a long time, as trees here and there had grown up among the masses of lava. But the road was fearful—and to make matters worse, it was necessary to cross a portion at least of the volcano, and the ascent over deep cracks in the earth and between huge rocks was anything but pleasant.

They appeared to have got half way across the mountain, and had reached a spot where the brushwood seemed to grow with greater freedom.

At all events, the ground was covered with a growth some five or six feet high, and sufficiently dense to conceal anybody who wished to hide himself.

The path on which they were traveling passed through this plantation, and after winding for some distance, led up to a barrier of rocks, in front of which was an open space.

Of course they still continued to keep a sharp watch; but with the exception already named, nothing had occurred to excite their suspicion.

On reaching the plantation, however, they were startled by seeing an Indian fully armed among the trees.

He instantly disappeared, but the incident caused Raymond some anxiety, and he gave the order to drive the mules quickly up the path.

His keen eye saw at a glance that if he could but reach the rocky breastwork on the summit of the hill, he would be in less danger, and in case of an attack, could offer a bold defence.

There was a big tree lying on the path right in front of them.

It was about six feet in diameter, and they had to skirt it on their way up.

It had evidently been blown down years ago; for it had rotted away at either end, and there was a hollow about two feet across right through.

It caused a little delay; but Raymond was rather glad than otherwise, for it would at all events cause the pursuers still more.

"Quick," he cried—"Not a moment must be lost! Remember, if the beggars show themselves we must fight behind the barricade of rocks; so be ready at the word of command."

He sprang up the path followed closely by the others; and the party made the way at full gallop through the plantation to the barrier which they reached in safety.

"Now for it, my lads!" Raymond. "Over with them!"

The mules somehow scrambled over the rocks, the riders leaped to the ground, and, giving the animals to take care of themselves, secured the muzzles of their rifles were extending over the edge ready to give the enemy a warm reception.

They were not a moment too soon; for scarcely were they in position before a troop of Indians, some on foot and some on horses, emerged into the open space in front of the barricade, and advanced to the attack.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ATTACK.

The breastwork was about three feet high. Not very formidable, you will say; but still quite sufficient to afford a capital shelter. As long as they kept their heads below the edge, they had nothing to fear from the weapons of their enemies, who, they knew, would be armed only with spears and bows and arrows.

Raymond gave a rapid glance at the situation, and saw that in front they were almost impregnable, at least as long as powder and shot held out.

On each side of them the rocks rose to a considerable height. The only doubt was whether the Indians could command the heights or out-flank them; if so, he and his companions would be caught as in a trap, and escape, except by a miracle, would be impossible.

The mules seemed to know that something was the matter, for they stood a little distance off, huddled together as if for safety.

The party was disposed so as to offer as little front to the enemy as possible. In the post of danger, close to the barricade, knelt Raymond and Phil, their rifles resting on the top of the rocks, and their fingers on the triggers. Behind them were the two sailors with their muskets and Harry with his rifle, and in this position they awaited the attack. But to their surprise the Indians seemed to hesitate, although by the flourishing of their spears and hatchets it would seem as if they were but awaiting the word of command. When they had first appeared, however, a couple of shots had been fired by Raymond and Harry, and this, doubtless, had checked the advance.

"It won't be long," said Phil, grimly. "Their way of fighting is the way of all cowards—they're afraid to show themselves unless there's plenty of 'em together."

They could see for a considerable distance down the path, and by peeping between the rocks, could watch without much danger to themselves.

"Here they are!" suddenly exclaimed Raymond.

"Now, my lads, keep cool. We mustn't waste a single shot. Every bullet must reach its mark. You understand me?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the sailors; while Phil looked straight in front of him, as much as to say:

"Only let me have a chance!"

"Don't fire, men," continued Raymond, in a low, determined voice, "until you see us loading; and then, if the beggars haven't had enough, let fly."

The Indians had evidently determined to make a general attack, relying on their numbers to take the place by storm. They advanced slowly and cautiously, almost creeping along the ground. How many there were of them Raymond could not tell, but thought there could not be less than fifty or sixty.

"How many bullets have we?" he asked, still watching the advance of the enemy as foot by foot they drew nearer.

"We haven't more'n fifty," said the two sailors.

"Fifty," repeated the captain, "and a hundred more for our rifles. Well; with them we ought to frighten the rascals a little."

The most advanced of the Indians had now got within sixty yards of the barricade. Whether he saw the heads of any of the party above the rocks or not, I cannot tell; but he suddenly arose from his stooping position, and drew his bow, in the string of which an arrow was already fitted. The movement was his last. The next moment the sharp crack of Raymond's rifle was heard, and the Indian, shot right in the heart—for Raymond's aim rarely missed—bounced a foot in the air, and dropped backwards a lifeless body.

"That's one!" said Phil, coolly.

The effect of the shot on the rest of the party was marvelous. They had seen nothing beyond a flash and a wreath of white smoke, and yet here was their comrade lying on the ground, with a deep wound in his breast, from which the blood was flowing. They rushed forward, looked at the dead man on the ground for an instant, and then gazed wildly at each other. Raymond could even hear them talking excitedly among themselves, and hoped that the shot had been sufficient to frighten them from renewing the attack.

"If they're like the savages as I've seen elsewhere, they won't like a second dose, cap'n," said Phil; "but I don't fancy them palavering there among themselves. If they'd been Sambos they'd have run away long afore this."

Phil was right. Whatever race the Indians belonged to, they were certainly not Sambos. They were all tall, stout fellows, and had not the dark complexions nor the woolly hair of the inhabitants of the Mosquito coast. Besides, they were many hundreds of miles from the country of the Sambos, which, as I before mentioned, lies on the coast to the southwest of the Caribbean Sea, and it was not at all likely the lazy fellows would have found their way across the mountains and rapid rivers of the interior.

"Shall I fire right into 'em, cap'n?" said Phil, who was eager to have a brush with the enemy.

"No, no; it would be murder," hastily replied Raymond. "Wait till we see if they are going to attack us again."

"They won't give up so easily, that's certain," said Phil, half-disappointed at Raymond's answer.

"Never mind; whatever they may do, we won't fire unless in self-defense," returned Raymond.

Phil said nothing, but he thought to himself that the captain would soon repent his decision.

Their enemies were evidently consulting together, and though astonished at the very mysterious death of their companion, were not inclined to give up so easily. After talking excitedly, and waving their hands and flourishing their arms in a strange kind of way, the group suddenly separated, and three gigantic fellows, with long spears in their hands, dashed up the ascent, followed by the rest.

Crack! crack! went the rifles of Phil and Raymond, and down went two of the leaders.

"Give 'em the other barrel, Phil," said the captain, as calmly as if he were giving an order for some dinner.

Crack! crack! again went the rifles, and two more warriors bit the dust.

"Your rifle, Harry—quick!" said Raymond, handing his empty weapon to the lad, who gave his in exchange.

There was a wavering and hesitation among the Indians, but it was not for long. Rushing on once more, they discharged an avalanche of spears and arrows at the besieged, and having done this, suddenly turned tail and fled down the incline.

Careful as the defenders of the barricade had been to conceal themselves, they found the rocks, from their lowness, did not sufficiently protect them.

The majority, indeed, of their enemies' weapons passed harmlessly over their heads, or rebounded splintered from the hard rock; but one of the arrows struck the sailor called Jack, and gave him a slight wound on the shoulder.

"I'd give something if we could only make the barricade a trifle higher," exclaimed Raymond, between his teeth.

Harry looked around, but the rocks which were lying loose around them could only be lifted by three or four men; and as at any moment they might be again attacked, it would have been madness for any of the defenders to have left their posts.

But could not anything else be done?

Again the lad looked anxiously around.

His eye fell upon the mules, which were standing still a few yards at the rear.

Why not use the saddles?

The saddles in use in Mexico and Central America are very large, cumbersome things, and the thought instantly flashed across the lad's mind that they would make a capital defense.

"Captain Raymond," he whispered, "I'm going to get the saddles off the mules to put on the top of the barricade."

"The very thing," returned Raymond, almost gayly.

"As quickly as you like, my boy."

Giving the captain the rifle which he had just reloaded, Harry darted away to the mules, and began to rapidly unstrap the saddles.

In a few moments he had got two off and brought them to Raymond, and then went back for the third,

which, loaded as it was with the baggage, took a little longer time.

At last this also was taken off, and the three, placed on the top of the rocks, raised the barricade almost a foot.

It was true it did not quite reach the whole width of the defile, but was sufficient to protect the party.

"That's a goodish sight better," exclaimed Phil, as he rose from the cramped position which the lowness of the defense had forced him to assume. "There'll be some little comfort now in fighting."

Phil's remark almost made the boy laugh, in spite of the danger they were in.

"It would be still more comfortable if there was no fighting, though," said he.

Five or six minutes had now elapsed since the Indians had fled, and Raymond began to think that they had quite enough.

They had lost five of their party, and their fate doubtless had had a good effect.

On the side of the besieged little damage had been done, for the wound on Jack's shoulder was but a slight one, and providing the arrow was not poisoned, was not likely to cause him much annoyance.

Not an Indian was now to be seen.

They had dispersed among the woods below, and perhaps would not reappear.

The fragment of the tree, which I before mentioned as lying in the path, however, rather obstructed the sight, and it was just possible some of the foe might still be hanging about.

"Phil," said Raymond, suddenly, "just watch that log for a moment and tell me what you think."

Phil stared at the captain, wondering what was the meaning of the strange order, but did as he was told.

He gazed fixedly at the mass of rotten wood, and, to his amazement saw it move.

There could be no mistake about it.

It seemed to bend towards them, waver to and fro for a moment, and then topple over.

"I'm blest!" he ejaculated. "What on earth does that mean? That don't move by itself, I know."

"If I'm not mistaken," returned Raymond, "it means this—that there are Indians behind who are pushing it."

Yes, there was no doubt Raymond was right; but for what purpose were the Indians moving the tree. The explanation was simple enough. While they kept under its cover they were safe, and they hoped, by getting it near enough to the barricade, to make a sudden dash and overpower the defenders by sheer force of numbers.

Raymond watched the moving mass narrowly in hopes some of the fellows might show themselves. But no; they kept well behind, and not a chance did they give him of a shot.

"The cunning rascals!" he exclaimed, bitterly. "They've profited by our example with a vengeance."

Harry was close by the captain's side, and had also seen the tree move and heard the explanation.

"There must be a lot of them," said he, "to move that big log. But how is it we don't see the others?"

Without giving himself time to think of the danger he was exposing himself to, the boy sprang to the top of the barricade.

From that position he could see over the log, and one glance was enough to show him the state of affairs. As near as he could tell, the Indians were six abreast.

Each row was close to the one immediately in front, and the last row of all seemed to be almost crawling on their breasts, so near were they to the ground.

There seemed to him to be about four rows, which would make four and twenty men in all.

Of course it was but a very rapid look which Harry had of the enemy, for it would have been dangerous for him to have remained long exposed—and almost the next moment he was by Raymond's side.

"Captain," said he, "what's to be done? In a few minutes they'll be upon us, and I don't think we can get a shot at them."

Raymond racked his brain for an expedient to get them out of their difficulty, but he could think of nothing.

Measuring the huge trunk with his eye, he saw that at least it was six feet in diameter, and at least two feet higher than their own barricade.

The Indians, it was evident, were absolutely protected, unless the besieged could fire from a greater height.

This, of course, could not be done; for, did they attempt to climb to the top of the barricade, they would be riddled with arrows.

"Harry, my boy," said he, in a low voice, "it'll be a hand-to-hand fight. There's no other way. We may frighten them, but I fear the worst. Now, we're all in the same boat, and I want every one to speak his mind. We've got two courses open to us—one is to stay and fight, and the other to run, trusting to our mules to get us out of the scrape. Of course, if we take the latter, we leave the shelter of our barricade, and I'm pretty sure we should be overtaken at last. However, I won't decide, but shall leave it to the others. What do you say—shall we fight or run?"

"Captain Raymond," said Harry, in a calm voice, "if all is lost, we can but die fighting. It will only come a little sooner than we expected it, that's all."

Raymond looked in the boy's face, and saw no signs of fear in it.

True, his cheeks were a little pale, but his eyes were as bright as ever, and there was a firmness about his mouth which did not belie his words.

"Good!" muttered Raymond to himself. "The lad's made of the right stuff. I knew he was." He held out his hand, which Harry clasped, and a look passed between them which was more eloquent than words.

But how about the others?

Raymond was sure of Phil; but would the other two sailors fight to the last? He turned to them and said:

"Now, my lads, we've got a hard battle before us;

and even if we gain the victory, some of us may get knocked over. There are the mules, but they are only three in number. Now, you can do as you like, and I shan't reproach you. If you take two mules, no doubt you will have time to get away, as we don't mean to give in while we've got any breath in us. But if you decide to stay with us—why, I'm not going to tell you I shan't be glad to have two brave fellows. There's not a moment to be lost, so choose a' once."

And they did choose, like true sailors as they were.

"Cap'n," said Jack, "I never did desert a messmate in trouble, and I'm not a-going to do it now. Come what may, we sticks to you; and if you see me show ti white feather, just you put a bullet through me. Ain't that so, Bill?" said he to his companion.

"Ay, ay. Me an' Jack's lived and sailed together six years come next March, and I'm blest if we don't die together if need be."

There was no mistaking the hearty tone of their voices.

"Thank ye, my lads," cried Raymond, shaking each by the hand. "I knew you'd say so. As for you, Phil—"

"There's no call to ask me," interrupted Phil, gruffly. "You knowed me afore to-day."

"Ay, that I have, friend," returned Raymond, laying his hand on Phil's shoulder. "Well, then, we're all agreed to fight—is not that so?"

"Ay, ay," shouted the men. "Let 'em come; we're ready."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DEADLY CONFLICT.

AND not a moment too soon.

Slowly but surely advanced the huge log, and now it was not more than ten yards from the barricade.

Raymond tightened his belt and drew a deep breath, for he knew the attack would soon be made.

"When they spring give 'em one good peppering and then club your rifles. If they're not beaten back at first, there'll be no time for reloading."

"I say, captain," whispered Harry, rapidly, "we might let them have one taste from the top of the barricade. They won't be prepared for that, you know, and then we shall have time to reload."

"Good!" returned Raymond.

In a few words he directed Phil what to do. Harry, Phil and himself were to spring to the top of the barricade, discharge their rifles, and instantly retire; then the sailors were to advance and keep the Indians at bay with their muskets while the others reloaded.

"Now," said Raymond, in a loud voice.

In an instant the three sprang to the top of the rocks. They could see a crowd of Indians crouching down behind the trunk; and they fired right in among them. Without waiting to see what had been the effect of their shots, they jumped down to their former posts, and began reloading. They could hear a low moaning sound, and could see that the progress of the log was stopped. Evidently the Indians had received a severe check.

"Quick!" cried Raymond, ramming a bullet down his rifle. "We shall have time to fire again before they recover themselves."

They were about to climb the barricade once more, when they heard a frightful yell from the other side. They knew too well it was the war-cry of the Indians.

"Now for it," said Raymond. "Blaze away, my lads, while you can!"

There was a hurried sound of feet, and the Indians attacked the barricade.

They clambered up like monkeys; but such was their eagerness that they tumbled over each other.

There was a confused mass of struggling arms and legs; but before a single man had jumped down, Raymond's clear voice was heard above the din.

"Fire!" he cried; and the next instant three of the Indians fell back mortally wounded.

But what were three out of twenty or thirty?

Their places were instantly occupied, and what was worse, the shots did not have the effect of frightening the others.

Again the word of command was given, and the second barrels of the three rifles were emptied with as good effect as before.

There was a lull in the attack; for the bodies of the wounded men obstructed the passage of the others.

In obedience to instructions, the two sailors advanced and the others retired to reload; but they had not time to do so.

Infuriated by the resistance of the party, the Indians pressed forward.

The sailors fired their muskets; but the next moment two of the besiegers had made their way across the barricade.

Phil's quick eye saw the movement, and seizing his rifle by the barrel, half way between the muzzle and the trigger, he swung the stock round and brought it down with a heavy thud upon the head of one of the Indians. The man fell beneath the force of the blow; but the other, who was armed with a spear, darted forward and made a thrust at Phil.

Jack saw the intention, and with his right hand, which held the musket, turned the weapon aside, while with his left he dealt the fellow such a downright English blow, that the man staggered. The opportunity was not lost by Phil, who in a cool, business-like way brought down his death-dealing weapon a second time.

Again he was successful, but he at once saw he had his work to do. Unchecked by musket or rifle—for the last shot had been fired—the Indians stormed the barricade, and forced the defenders to retire several paces.

Raymond performed prodigies of valor.

He engaged himself against two of the Indians, one of whom he had twice knocked down with his rifle.

The other, who was armed with a spear, strangely enough, threw it away, and seizing Raymond with his

open hands, strove to bear him towards the barricade.

But he had to contend against a practised wrestler. With a grasp of iron, the captain seized his antagonist by the throat and threw him with tremendous force against the rock at one side of the defile, inflicting a frightful wound upon his head, and leaving him senseless.

"Bravo, cap'n!" cried Phil, who had just dispatched his third man, and came running to his friend's assistance.

"It's not much good, Phil," said Raymond. "See, the beggars are thicker than ever."

The Indians had evidently received reinforcements, for although great execution had been done by the defenders, yet they were as numerous as ever.

They swarmed over the barricade like bees, and soon the brave little band found themselves surrounded.

But the strangest part of the whole was that the Indians did not seem to use their weapons.

True, nearly every one of the adventurers was wounded more or less severely, but the wounds were more accidental than intentionally inflicted.

Excited and busily engaged as they were, they could not help noticing this extraordinary behavior, especially as they saw several of the Indians deliberately throw their weapons away.

At one part of the conflict, Harry found himself near to Raymond, and he hurriedly whispered his surprise at the conduct of their antagonists. He shuddered when he heard his companion say, in a low, meaning voice:

"They mean to take us alive!"

Harry did not know the full import of Raymond's words; but from the tone in which they were uttered, he suspected some dreadful meaning was conveyed in them.

He had no time to think, however, for he found himself attacked by a tall athletic Indian, who threw his arms around him, and, fairly lifting him off his feet, carried him towards the barricade.

Raymond saw him carried struggling by, and, leaving the Indian with whom he was engaged, darted to his rescue. But it was of no avail. He was surrounded by a crowd of savages, and though he could hear the lad's voice, he could not approach him.

The conflict was now nearly at an end. Already the two sailors, in spite of their resistance, had been overpowered, and were lying, with their arms and legs tightly secured, on the ground. Phil, seeing Raymond rush to Harry's rescue, followed him, but was in his turn surrounded. A few minutes' sharp fighting, and they found themselves borne to the ground, exhausted and overpowered. Finding that resistance was useless, they yielded, and they too, like the sailors, were soon securely tied.

Fortunately they were not separated, which was some consolation; for though they were in sad straits, yet they were able to talk and comfort each other.

They could see by the number of bodies lying about that they had killed at least twenty of their enemies, while the number of the wounded showed how stout had been their resistance. The first thing the Indians did was to take possession of their mules and baggage. Strange to say, they did not touch their arms, which were placed carefully on the ground beside the prisoners, and this caused Harry no little surprise.

"I suspect," said Raymond, "they look upon them as enchanted, and that prevents their taking possession of them."

Whatever it was, they appeared to hold the guns and pistols in very great respect; and what was even more strange, they could not have paid more homage to the prisoners had they been kings instead of captives.

"Well, this is a rum go," observed Phil, reflectively, as one of the Indians came up and offered him some food.

"If I'd a known this, I don't think I should have bothered myself about fighting."

The prisoners were sitting on the ground when Phil made this remark, and he happened to be next to Raymond.

The latter bent his head as near as he could to Phil's ear and whispered.

"We're not out of the wood yet, Phil. I believe they wanted to take us alive for some horrible purpose or other."

Phil's bronzed cheek paled a little when he heard this.

It had never occurred to him why the Indians had been so careful not to harm them, but now all was explained.

They were destined to be sacrificed.

"I believe you're right, cap'n," said he, after a pause.

"Don't let the others know yet," whispered Raymond.

"No, no; they'll learn it soon enough," groaned Phil.

It took the Indians some time to recover themselves from the effects of the battle.

The dead were speedily buried, two or three inches of soil being sufficient to cover them, while the wounds of the others were soon dressed.

Towards evening they made signs to their captives that they were about to start, and the rifles and pistols having been put in charge of two of the Indians, and the thongs removed from the legs of the prisoners, their arms being left bandaged, the party set out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LAKE NICARAGUA.

THE Indians were about fifty strong. They were a warlike set of fellows, and, singular to say, they had fair skins and blue eyes.

They treated their prisoners very well, but kept a strict watch lest they should escape.

For a whole week they journeyed through lovely scenery, and had it not been for the gloomy fate which

was in store for them, Raymond would have been quite content with his position.

It was now the dry season, and the month of February was well advanced.

In some parts the ground looked quite parched, and the vegetation burnt up and withered; but a little way up the mountain slopes, where the temperature was cooler, everything was still quite fresh and green.

These Indians generally traveled by night and encamped in the daytime, and the only restriction they imposed upon their prisoners was that of keeping silence on their journey.

They had not much difficulty in making themselves understood—for it is surprising how readily savages can talk by signs; and though the prisoners and their captors could not speak a word of each other's language, yet they could converse well enough by signs.

As they proceeded on their journey, Harry noticed many animals and birds which were quite new to him.

There were plenty of wild hogs, who delight in nothing so much as in hunting after serpents, and who can bolt rattlesnakes with impunity; that curious animal, the tapir, with its long snout, was often seen, while scores of armadillos frequently crossed their path.

Sloths, which are by no means so slow as people suppose, were here and there clasping a branch of some favorite tree with their arms and legs; hundreds of ring-tailed monkeys chattered, while the woods were alive with a multitude of squirrels with their soft and prettily marked fur.

Then as to birds, Harry thought he had never seen so many.

There were scarlet and blue macaws, broad-billed toucans, enormous crax alectors, with their magnificently plumed heads, any number of gray parrots and cockatoos, purple-chested woodpeckers, flocks of pretty wood-pigeons, and, above all, the gayly shining humming-bird.

Nothing in the world is more beautiful than to see these exquisitely-colored little creatures hovering from blossom to blossom, and extracting the sweet food with their delicate tongues.

Sometimes they are seen poisoning themselves in the air, and moving their wings so rapidly that the motion can scarcely be detected, and thus they produce the buzzing sound from which they take their name.

The most common species is likewise one of the most gorgeous in its color, and the metallic luster of its wings and the bright crimson of its throat, especially when seen in the sunshine, are almost dazzling.

For a long time Harry was puzzled by a peculiar sound which he was always hearing.

It was as if a bough was creaking in the wind; but as he often heard it when there was scarcely a breath of air, he could hardly think that was the reason.

At last he questioned Phil, when they were encamped one day, and the latter pointed out to him a curious-looking bird, with a magnificent yellow tail, and told him that was called the Montezuma bird, and the sound he heard was its peculiar note.

"Did you ever see so many birds and animals before, Phil?" he inquired.

"No, but I think I know the cause," returned Phil. "We see we've got into the dry season. Well, every pool of water and little stream'll be dried up afore long, and then the birds and the beasts'll be hard put to it. We can't be far off some larger river or lake, maybe, else all these living things wouldn't crowd so together."

Phil had also remarked the flocking together of the animals and birds to Raymond; and on comparing notes, they agreed the party must be approaching very near either to Lake Managua or to Lake Nicaragua.

"The country isn't so wild as it was," observed Raymond, "and we've passed several haciendas. That must account for our traveling always in the night. The Indians evidently don't want to meet with more people than they can help, and so our chances of being rescued are not many."

"That's so," returned Phil, through whose mind several plans of escape had floated, but with none of which he was quite satisfied.

The haciendas, I may tell you, are simply farms, many of which are surrounded by a natural wall of the cactus plant.

Some of these grow twenty or twenty-five feet high, and they stand so close and are so thickly covered with spines, that it is a very difficult matter to break through them, and a fence of cactus is really one of the best in the world.

About ten days after their capture they came upon a winding road which appeared to descend gradually between steep banks covered with the most beautiful flowers imaginable.

There must have been several hundreds of different kinds of creeping plants—for even some of the trees were covered with them; and those that forced their way to the top of the trunks, and formed themselves into lovely natural vases and bouquets, exceeded in beauty anything which Harry had yet seen.

The sun had just risen when the party entered this path, and Raymond was rather surprised that the order was not given to encamp, as it was generally their practice so to do when daylight approached.

"What's the meaning of it, I wonder?" he thought to himself. "Have we really reached our journey's end?"

He soon found an explanation.

On going a few yards further he could see a sheet of water gleaming like silver in the bright rays of the morning sun.

It was about a mile distant, and seemed to stretch away in the distance as far as the eye could reach.

"Here's the lake, at all events," thought Raymond. "Now, if my suspicions are right as to the nation to which these Indians belong, they'll most likely want to go on the water."

During the journey the captain had been closely

watching and studying the people into whose hands he had fallen, and at last had come to the conclusion that they were the Guatosos—a fierce nation living to the southeast of Lake Nicaragua, on the banks of the Frio, a river which empties itself into the lake not far from the mouth of the San Juan.

If his conclusions were correct, the discovery was a most important one, for the country of the Guatosos was situated as near as possible in that part of Central America described by the old buccaneer whose manuscript was in his possession.

"Yes," he mused, "we are probably now near the northeastern corner of Nicaragua, and if so, they will journey the rest of the way by water."

Somehow or other, in spite of the danger which threatened him and his companions—for their lives would not have been spared but for some dreadful purpose or other—the sudden fulfillment of his hopes made him almost joyous and glad.

But he said nothing to his friends, as at present all was uncertain.

As Raymond expected, the Indians proceeded to the edge of the lake.

As he looked at the dancing waves and felt the scorching rays of the sun, he longed for a swim in the crystal waters.

He made signs to the Indians, but they shook their heads, and perhaps it was quite as well he did not bathe; for on approaching near the bank a couple of hideous alligators lazily swam away, looking as they did so like huge logs of wood.

How were the Indians going to travel on the water?—that was the puzzle.

Nothing like a boat could be seen, and yet the Indians evidently had some plan in their heads. However, they were soon to see what it was.

On coming to the lake about twenty men left the party and disappeared among the trees which lined the edge.

Soon Raymond could hear them shouting as if they were pulling something, and by-and-by he saw them in the water pushing and towing a big ugly-looking boat about forty feet long and five feet wide.

Leaving it by itself, they again disappeared; and after more shouting, brought a second boat, the very image of the first.

The boats were what are called bongos. The largest trees are only used for them, the trunks being simply hollowed out.

They are about five feet deep, and the bottom is round, without any keel. About ten feet of the stern is covered with bull-hides, forming a kind of awning, while in the middle are five or six seats for the rowers.

Each bongo had its mast and sail, something like that of a lug sail, and would carry about twenty men safely.

Directly the bongos were alongside, the Indians put their horses (of which there were five or six) on board, and made signs to Raymond and Harry to get into one, and for Phil and the sailors to get into the other.

They did not much like being separated; but it was of no use to object, so of course they obeyed.

There was one consolation, however—their arms were no longer tied, their captors thinking no doubt that escape from the bongo was impossible.

Pointing to the awning, or *atoldo* as it was called, the leader of the party directed Raymond and Harry to take their seats underneath.

They did so, but found the smell from the hides so abominable that they begged to be allowed to sit outside in the body of the boat.

This request was granted, but they found the heat of the sun almost as unbearable as the smell from the skins.

The men started the bongos by walking into the water waist high, and pushing with their backs.

Then springing inside they set the sail and took their places at the oars.

For the first day the traveling was pleasant enough, for the water was calm and the wind in their favor.

Towards evening they passed an island on which was a mountain which rose some five thousand feet above the level of the water.

As soon as Raymond saw this his eyes brightened, and he said to Harry:

"It's all right. We're on Lake Nicaragua, for there's the volcanic mountain of Zepatero."

"What is all right?" inquired Harry; but Raymond would not tell him any more, beyond saying that everything had turned out exactly as he could have wished.

The next morning brought with it a gloomy sky and a disagreeable chopping wind.

"I don't like this at all," said Raymond, in an anxious tone. "I've heard that on Lake Nicaragua the storms are as dangerous as on the ocean, and with this tub of a craft, it'll be as much as we can do to weather it."

Scarcely had he spoken when a terrible gust of wind came, and, catching the sail at a very awkward angle, sent the bongo heeling over to leeward, and half filled her with water.

The storm had burst upon them.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

A storm on Lake Nicaragua is by no means a slight matter.

Even old sailors who have sailed round the world, and weathered the fierce gales of the Atlantic and the terrible *simoom* of the China Seas, have been known to look grave when talking of the Nicaraguan storms.

Not, perhaps, that they are so grand, but because the danger is quite as great.

The surface of the water becomes agitated in a peculiar way, assuming, in fact, the appearance of what is known in nautical phrase as a "chopping sea;" the wind seems to come from all quarters of the compass;

and the consequence is that even well constructed boats find it difficult to make headway. But when the craft is an awkward *bongo*, fitted only for smooth water, the risk of being upset is very great indeed.

When the *bongo* heeled over, Raymond and Harry threw themselves to windward, and caught fast by the side of the boat.

The Indians were in a state of the utmost terror, and evidently did not know what to do. The horses on board were thrown off their legs by the sudden heeling over of the boat, and, together with a couple of men, were hurled into the boiling waters.

It was useless to think of saving them, and, indeed, the boat was forced along so violently by the hurricane that they were already out of sight.

Meanwhile the *bongo* was rapidly filling with water.

The big, awkward sail was stretched out in the form of a bow, the cordage being strained as tight as a violin string.

Raymond saw in an instant that all hope of safety lay in the hauling down of the sail.

But not one of the Indians had any idea of this, and all they thought of was how to bail out the water.

"Your knife, Harry—quick, my lad!" shouted Raymond, edging himself towards where the ropes were secured to the side of the *bongo*. "We must cut them. It's our only chance."

Harry at once handed his companion his knife, and Raymond slashed the ropes right and left.

With a noise as of a gun, the sail flew up in the air, and for the moment things looked even worse than before.

The sail charged as it was with wet, had become of enormous weight, and threatened every moment to overturn the *bongo* completely, unless, indeed, the rope which held it to the mast gave way.

Clutching Raymond by the shoulder, Harry whispered in his ear:

"Let me have the knife. I'm going to climb the mast."

Raymond stared in amazement, for although it was the only thing which could save them, yet to climb the mast in such a wind was almost impossible.

"Do you want to kill yourself?" he cried. "Why, it would be the act of a madman!"

"Never mind," returned Harry, resolutely. "Mad or not mad, I mean to try. Besides," he added, "one may as well be drowned one way as another."

Raymond looked up at the flying sail, and at the boat, which was inclined to the water at a fearfully dangerous angle; and handing the knife to the lad, bade him go in God's name.

With the blade between his teeth, Harry let go his hold of the side and sprang to the mast, which he caught between both hands.

Then grasping it tightly, he commenced to ascend.

It was a great risk he was running, and it was as much as he could do to hold on to the mast, let alone the climbing.

He had got half-way up; and he felt himself growing exhausted, when suddenly there came a lull in the tempest, which gave him fresh hope.

The lull lasted only a few seconds, but was sufficient.

With renewed strength he pulled himself a few feet higher, and stretching out his hand, drew the knife across the rope which bound the sail to the mast.

There was a flap and a whiz, and like the wing of some mighty bird, the released sail was borne aloft, and in a few seconds lost to sight.

"Bravo, Harry!" shouted Raymond, in encouraging tones. "Be careful, my boy, how you come down," he added, warningly.

It did not take Harry long to slide down the mast, and almost the next moment he was standing by Raymond's side.

Freed from the sail, the *bongo* righted itself, and though it was half filled with water, yet it swam tolerable buoyantly on the surface of the lake.

The Indians in the meantime had recovered their senses.

They had seen Harry ascend the mast, although they had not the least idea what he was going to do; but directly they saw the vessel gain its upright position, they began to bale out the water as fast as they could.

The rowers, of whom there were ten, left their oars to help, and in a few moments they succeeded in lightening the *bongo* considerably.

But the danger was not yet over.

On all sides the white-crested waves came rolling and tumbling over each other with tremendous violence, and now and then one would break over the vessel, and deluge it with a torrent.

The men were kept hard at work baling out, and at times it was as much as they could do to keep pace with the enemy.

Although all this takes some time to write, it really occupied but a very few minutes, and when Raymond and Harry could look about them, their first thought was of the other *bongo*, which had Phil and the two sailors on board. What had become of it?

They looked anxiously round, but could see nothing but the angry waters.

It might be that the furious waves, some of which were of great height, prevented them seeing very far, and if so, when the wind went down perhaps they would catch sight of the *bongo*.

At all events, they hoped so, and waited most impatiently for the storm to cease.

Fortunately the storms on the lake do not last long, and in less than an hour's time the rowers were once more at their places; the violence of the gale had lessened, and the fury of the waves was giving place to a calm.

Once more they looked round.

"I can see nothing but water, captain," said Harry, mournfully. "Do you think they have weathered it?"

"Well, if we could, I should think they ought to have done so too," returned Raymond. "Phil is a capital seaman, and with two sailors besides, it would be hard if they couldn't do as well as ourselves."

"Yes, but suppose they hadn't got their liberty, they wouldn't be able to do much," objected Harry; "and their arms were not untied, the same as ours, when we saw them last."

Raymond looked grave, for he saw the force of Harry's remark.

"Well," said he, after a pause, "let us hope for the best. We can't help the poor fellows, so it's no use fretting."

But in spite of his words, Raymond could not help feeling a pang of regret at the loss of his old friend and companion.

looks and dress from any Indians that we have seen before."

Yes, Harry had noticed that.

Most of the tribes they had met with had got at least one article of clothing which they must have borrowed from Europeans; but these wore dresses totally unlike any that the travelers had yet come across.

"Do you see the feathers which almost every man has got on his head, and the curiously fine-spun cloth on their bodies?" said Raymond.

Harry nodded.

"And their weapons too," continued the captain. As he spoke he carelessly took up a lance belonging to one of the Indians, and pointed to its sharp head. "That is not metal," he said, "but flint."



A troop of Indians emerged into the open space in front of the barricade, and advanced to the attack.

To be separated at all was bad enough, but to be separated forever was a calamity hard indeed to bear.

Meanwhile the *bongo* was being urged on by the rowers at a very fair pace.

The Indians seemed to feel very little the loss of their comrades, and all they thought of was to get out of the dangerous waters as soon as possible.

Raymond watched with great anxiety the course they were taking.

From the appearance of the men, he had come to the conclusion that they indeed belonged to the mysterious Guatosos, and he racked his brain in trying to recollect all he had ever heard about them.

While leaning over the side of the *bongo*, and in the midst of one of those reveries, he was suddenly interrupted by Harry, who asked him what he was thinking about.

"I was trying to satisfy myself as to what our captors are," he answered. "They are quite different in

Harry looked at the blade, and found to his astonishment that it was as Raymond had said.

"The old Mexicans," observed the latter, "used to call this flint *tzili*, and made their knives and lances and arrows heads from it. It's very singular we should find the same things in the hands of these people," he added, musingly.

"Why?" naturally asked the lad.

"Because, if all be true which I have heard—and certainly what I have seen of our captors seems to bear it out—we have fallen into the hands of one of the most extraordinary races, if not the most extraordinary race in the world."

Harry opened his eyes wide at this, and well he might.

Noticing his companion's look of astonishment, Raymond said:

"I've told you at one time or another a good deal about the ancient Mexicans, and you already know the

story of the old buccaneer. Well, it seems to me that not only is the old chap's tale quite true, but that we have got into the company of some of the first inhabitants of America.

Harry got more and more puzzled.

Whatever was Raymond talking about? In the company of people who lived hundreds and hundreds of years ago! Could his companion be mad?

Raymond read the expression on the boy's face, and with a half smile, said:

"You believe I am talking nonsense, I know; but listen to me for a little while, and then tell me what you think. When the Spanish adventurer Cortez discovered the City of Mexico in 1521, he found there a fierce, warlike race of people, called the Aztecs. Now the Aztecs don't concern us beyond the fact that they were by no means the original inhabitants of the country. The people I am thinking about are their predecessors, who were far before them in cleverness, and not half so cruel in their customs. This race was known by the name of the Toltecs, and though very little is known about them, that little is very important to us, at all events."

"To me and you, captain, do you mean?" cried Harry, in surprise.

"Yes," returned Raymond, gravely. "The Toltecs are supposed to have entered Mexico from the north, though where they came from is not known. They built a city north of the present capital, which they called Tula, and here they remained about four hundred years."

"How long ago was that, captain?" asked Harry.

"Well, the time of their entering Mexico is fixed in the seventh century, so they remained there until about the time William the Conqueror became king of England. From the ruins of Tula, and other cities which have been discovered, they appear to have been a very ingenious people, and were splendid architects; indeed, the word Toltec is used by the Mexicans as meaning an architect. Their houses and temples were magnificent, and what was more, their religion was not half so brutal as that of their successors, the Aztecs. Well, as I was saying, they lived in Mexico about four centuries, and then entirely disappeared."

"Disappeared!" repeated Harry.

"Yes; it is imagined that famine, disease, and, above all, the continued attacks of fierce enemies, reduced their numbers, and that they at last gave up the land over which they had once reigned supreme. Whether this was so or not, of course no one can tell; but it is certain that they all disappeared, and were never heard of afterwards."

"Well, then, whatever can they have to do with us now, if they were never heard of afterwards?" said Harry.

"A little patience, and you'll see," returned Raymond. "It is true that nothing is known how these people lived after the time they left Mexico; but for all that, traces of their handiwork have been found, and if I am not greatly mistaken, you and I have seen some of it."

"I?" replied Harry, incredulously.

"Don't you remember the hideous figure we found in the forest, when I had so narrow an escape from the Indian's arrow?" asked Raymond.

"Yes, I do, indeed," returned Harry.

"That figure," continued Raymond, "was, I believe, sculptured by those very Toltecs after they left Mexico. Certain it is that the remains of temples, palaces, and even cities have been found in different parts of Nicaragua and Honduras, and there is little doubt that the mysterious race settled in Central America, after giving up Mexico."

"But how it is no one knows anything about them?" inquired Harry.

"That's just what I was coming to," said his companion. "I dare say most of them gradually mixed with the native Indians, and so all traces of the original race died out; but I also fancy that a few buried themselves in the heart of some of the vast forests, such as the one we passed through, where they built their towns, and lived and died unknown to the rest of the world. If we may believe the manuscript of the old buccaneer, it was the inhabitants of one of these buried cities whom the mutineers of Sir Francis Drake's expedition fell in with, in their attempts to get to the Atlantic coast; and, if my suspicions are correct, it is the descendants of this very people who have captured us."

Captain Raymond's mysterious words had a strange effect upon Harry.

He scarcely knew whether to be alarmed or whether he ought to be glad.

If what his companion said was true, the secret surrounding the Golden Island would soon be solved; but of what consequence was that, if they were to be subjected to captivity, or even death?

There was something so terrible in the idea of a people living for centuries, completely buried and hidden from all the rest of the world, that it made him almost shudder when he thought of it.

And indeed he would have had reason to be afraid had Raymond told him all his forebodings concerning their fate; but the captain was merciful, and thought to himself it would be time enough to tell him all when the worst came to the worst.

After a pause, during which all kinds of wild and shadowy ideas had floated through his mind, Harry asked the captain where he thought the Indians were taking them.

"I expect we shall be in sight of the river Frio in about an hour's time. At the rate we have been going, we cannot have come less than eighty miles since we started; and as they have been keeping a southeasterly direction the whole course, we must soon get to the mouth of the river."

As Raymond uttered these words there was an order given by the chief of the party in his harsh, guttural voice, and the prisoners saw that the boat's head was turned slightly towards the shore.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE RIVER FRIO.

AFTER rowing for about half an hour, the rowers relaxed their efforts, and drew in towards the bank on their left.

The scenery at this point was much less grand than any they had passed through for some time.

Instead of magnificent trees and gorgeous flowers, the bank seemed a mass of reeds and tall, rank grass, which grew down to the water's edge, and even in the water itself.

The *bongo* was rowed by this bank for a quarter of a mile, keeping so close that the tall, sharp rushes brushed the sides of the vessel.

Raymond was standing in the prow intently watching the course the Indians were taking, and Harry by his side.

All at once he said:

"Do you see that opening right ahead?"

It was a break in the bank nearly a hundred yards wide, and looked like the entrance to some river.

Harry nodded, and asked whether that was the River Frio.

"I don't think there's any doubt about it," returned the captain. "But we shall see in a minute or two."

Soon the *bongo* reached the opening, and, as Raymond expected, its head was turned in the direction of the stream.

In a very little time they would be out of the lake.

The banks at the mouth of the Frio differed but little from that which they had just passed.

On each side the ground was marshy, and covered with tall reeds and long grass of a kind Harry had never seen before.

Swarms of water-fowl seemed to have found their home among the rushes, and some of them, disturbed by the noise of the oars, flew in the air with a hoarse note of fright, and hurried away from the intruders.

The air seemed thick with noisome insects, which settled on the face and body, where the latter was uncovered, and began stinging most unmercifully. The Indians either appeared to be quite used to the torment, or their red skins were so tough the sting could not penetrate; but Raymond and Harry, especially the latter, suffered terribly.

The lad's face began to puff up, and the itching was almost unbearable.

He leaned over the boat's side and laved his face with water.

"Shouldn't I like to have a bath!" said he.

"Ay, you'd make a nice meal for that gentleman there," returned Raymond, pointing to a huge fish, which was a few yards from the *bongo*. "That's one of the fresh-water sharks of the lake. It has swam up the river by way of a change, I suppose. He's an ugly customer, I can tell you."

Lake Nicaragua abounds in the fresh-water shark, which, though not so fierce as his brother of the ocean, is yet a very dangerous antagonist to the swimmer—much more so, indeed, than the alligator.

It was now getting towards evening, and in half an hour's time daylight had disappeared with a rapidity seen only in the tropics.

But it was not entirely dark, for the air was filled with swarms of fireflies, which lighted up the scene, and made Harry fancy he had got into fairyland.

The amount of light which these little creatures gave was astonishing.

Every man in the boat could be seen distinctly by the rest, and the banks on each side of the river seemed as if they were illuminated by thousands and thousands of lamps.

The fireflies of Central America are quite different to those of the East Indies and China.

In the latter, the fireflies are winged insects, with curiously-formed snouts, from which the light is given; but in Central America the species has more the appearance of a beetle than anything else.

It has a body about half an inch long, and rather narrow in form.

Its legs are very short and strong, and it has a singular power of being able to leap into the air when turned on its back.

If it were not for this power, it would not, by reason of its short legs, be able to turn when in this position.

There are two yellowish patches on the thorax or breast, from whence the light issues, and there are also two little bright points behind the eyes.

So much light do they give, that by the aid of two or three a person can easily see the time by a watch.

You can easily fancy, then, how enchanting the scene must be when illuminated by many thousands of these insects.

The Indians did not go very far in the night.

After supper, which consisted chiefly of fish, they moved the *bongo* close to the bank, and soon all, except two men who kept watch, were fast asleep—at least they tried to sleep, as far as the tiresome little insects would let them.

At sunrise next morning the Indians were alert, and Harry watched them kneel down, with their faces bowed towards the east, as if in adoration of the sun.

"Are they praying?" he whispered to Raymond.

"Yes," returned his companion. "They are sun-worshippers, as their forefathers hundreds and hundreds of years ago were. This but confirms my suspicions."

The Indians did not take long over their prayers, and soon the *bongo* was once more speeding up the stream.

As they advanced further into the interior the scenery changed for the better.

The reeds and rushes disappeared, and the stunted trees gave place to some of larger growth.

Flowers of every possible hue began to be seen, and in a little time the river seemed almost to be passing through a lovely garden.

Never before had the travelers seen such glorious

garlands as entwined the trees and festooned the banks on each side.

The brightest crimson, the most lovely blue, the most vivid yellow mixed with each other in endless variety, and almost dazzled the eye with their colors.

Bright, glossy, green leaves peeped out here and there, while a profusion of moss and ferns filled up every vacant space.

But the flowers were above everything the most delightful.

The recollection of that scene on the River Frio was one which never passed from the memories of our adventurers.

In spite, however, of the beauty of the scene, they could not help thinking of their brave companion Phil.

They prayed and hoped he might have escaped; but they feared the worst.

"There's one thing I'm sure of," said Raymond, "and that is, if Phil is not dead, he'll be sure to find us out somehow. He's got the courage and perseverance of a bull-dog; and depend upon it, if he is alive we shall see him again."

Harry thought so too; but then it was his nature to look upon the bright side of everything.

"After all, who knows but what he may be better off than ourselves?" continued Raymond. "We've got a hard fight before us, Harry, but we won't meet trouble half way—will we?"

Harry grasped his companion's hand in token of assent, although it must be owned that he did not feel very cheerful at the prospect which awaited them.

The Indians had rowed steadily all the morning, and it was now mid-day.

The sun was scorching hot, and the fierceness of its rays was tempered by the grateful shade of the broad trees on either side of the river.

They were now about twenty miles from the lake, and had reached a point where the river made a sudden bend.

There was a spit of sand which jutted out into the water, and round which the river turned.

Directly the Indians saw the sand they began talking excitedly, and Harry wondered what it was all about.

In a few moments two of the men leaped over the side of the *bongo*, and swam to the sand, which they commenced to examine carefully.

"What are they looking for, captain?" asked Harry. "Is it for gold?" he added, the thought flashing across his mind.

"No, I don't think that's likely. They wouldn't stop the boat for that surely," replied Raymond, watching the proceedings of the men curiously.

At last the two Indians suddenly stopped, and, uttering something in a loud voice, began to dig at the sand furiously with their hands, while their friends on board the *bongo* kept up an animated conversation, and appeared to be immensely interested in the operation.

In a few minutes' time the secret was disclosed, and Harry continued:

"Why, they're digging for eggs. What eggs do they expect to find there?"

"Either alligators' or turtles'," said Raymond. "It's rather singular; but wherever the alligator and fresh-water shark abound, you're pretty certain to find some turtles. But see what the fellows are doing! They're actually destroying them."

The diggers had come upon about a dozen alligator's eggs, each about the size of a goose's egg; but after looking at them closely, they smashed them against a large stone.

The fact was that they were not quite fresh, and when this is the case, the Indians always destroy them.

Soon they began to dig in another place and came across another lot of eggs, but smaller in size and more numerous.

"These are turtles' eggs, and very nice they are, too," said Raymond.

Such seemed to be the Indians' opinion—at all events by the noise they made.

The two men could not carry all at once, so they made several trips to and from the *bongo*.

The last time they did so there was a tremendous noise and splashing of water, and a monstrous alligator came to the surface and opened his hideous jaws as if in eagerness to seize his prey.

Instantly there was a terrible commotion.

The alligator was between the men and the *bongo*; and it certainly looked as if the creature intended to make a meal off one of the Indians.

Meanwhile those in the *bongo* commenced shouting and hurling their lances at the alligator, and the former seemed to frighten it a great deal more than the latter.

The two men in the water did not seem much afraid; and after all, there was not so very much danger, as the alligator of Central America very rarely attacks man.

This one certainly did not seem inclined to show fight.

It was about to glide off, and had already turned its awkward body to do so, when there was a sudden splash, a whiz through the air, and to every one's amazement a huge water-snake was seen with one coil of its shining yellow body twisted round the upper part of the alligator's tail.

Excitedly the Indians and their two prisoners watched the impending contest; and indeed it was a sight worth seeing.

The alligator seemed to know its danger, and strove with all its strength to seize its enemy, and one bite of those mighty jaws would have been quite sufficient.

But all its struggling was in vain.

The snake tightened its grasp, and sent its body in a beautiful curve once more round the tail of the alligator, enveloping and rendering useless one of the hind legs.

"Again the latter gave a tremendous plunge, splashing the water in all directions; but the snake only made its hold more secure.

Slowly but surely the serpent made its way up the body of its antagonist, who was writhing and struggling in a terrible fashion, and prepared to wind itself round the fore legs.

In doing so, however, it ventured dangerously near the gaping mouth of the alligator.

Snap came the jagged teeth together, there was a low crunching sound, and the next moment the snake, with its head crushed, unwound itself from the body of its intended prey, and disappeared beneath the water; while the alligator, as if it had had enough fighting for the day, quickly made off.

The combat seemed to rouse all the passions of the Indians.

They shouted and talked in the most violent manner; their eyes glared, and Harry fancied every moment they were about to jump into the water and take part in the fray.

But when the battle was over they resumed their usual half-sad expression; and the two men with the remainder of the eggs, having clambered into the *bongo*, the party went on its way.

The eggs were soon cooked and eaten, and the prisoners, to whom a share was given, made a very good meal.

The night came and went, and about two hours after sunrise there were signs that they were approaching the habitations of men.

Twice had they met Indians engaged in fishing, and on each occasion those in the boat talked excitedly with the fishermen, pointing to Harry and Raymond, and making all manner of gestures.

Raymond felt very anxious when he saw this, the more so because those to whom the intelligence was conveyed seemed highly delighted.

"It bodes evil to us, I'm certain," he thought; but he kept his thoughts to himself.

In the afternoon of that day, which was the third after leaving Lake Nicaragua, the *bongo* was stopped by order of the chief, and pushed by means of the oars against the bank.

"What's the meaning of this?" said Harry. "Are we going to land?"

"It looks very much like it," returned Raymond, with a troubled look; for he knew not what might happen.

Soon one of the Indians jumped into the water, and with a liana rope in his hand, waded to the bank.

Then climbing up, he secured the *bongo* to the trunk of a cocoa palm.

"We never stopped in the daytime before," exclaimed Raymond, when he saw this. "We need not trouble ourselves now where we are going, Harry," said he, "for we have got to our journey's end."

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE BURIED CITY.

AND indeed it seemed like it, as far as the journey on the river was concerned. One by one the men jumped out, and then made signs for Harry and Raymond to follow them.

They found themselves on the edge of a dark and seemingly impenetrable forest. The ground beneath them was marshy, but was covered with vegetation; and Harry looked at Raymond in dismay, for he could see nothing like a path anywhere.

And as for breaking through the tangled mass of cactus and aloes, bound together as they were with a web of liana and luxuriant creepers, it was impossible.

"The Indians know their way, depend upon it," said Raymond, in reply to Harry.

And so they did; for forming themselves into single file, they skirted the edge of the forest, and proceeded some distance along the river.

Raymond and Harry were placed in the center, but much to their satisfaction, their arms were left free.

By-and-by they came to an opening in the jungle, so slight that an unpracticed eye would have passed it over without notice.

It had all the appearance as if some small animal had recently forced its way through.

The leader of the party at once pushed the bushes aside, however, and entered the forest, followed by the others.

They had some difficulty in getting through, but after awhile the path became wider, and two could walk abreast without much difficulty.

What strange creatures did they not see in that walk through the forest! Great hairy spiders with short legs, but with flat bodies four inches across, hung from gigantic webs; black, ferocious-looking scorpions, with claws like those of a crab, crawled on the ground; frogs of blood-red color hopped over their feet as they walked; while swarms of the poisonous *agarapata*, which the travelers brushed off the plants, got into their clothing and caused intolerable torture.

They are only seen in the dry season, and generally choose as their place of residence the points of leaves and grass.

The only way to get them off the skin, into which they burrow with their sharp claws, is to press a piece of wax over the dark spot which indicates their presence; the insect sticks to the wax and comes away with it.

They are the greatest torment the traveler in Central America can possibly have.

The monkeys they saw were very curious. They were of the species known among the natives by the name of *congo*.

Fifty or sixty of them would all be on the same tree, and the noise they made was most horrible.

It was not like the incessant chatter of the ringtail variety, but an unearthly moaning and howling,

which in that dark, gloomy forest, had a most depressing effect.

Then there were raccoons and opossums in abundance, and more than once there was a rustle; and gleaming in the darkness would be two glowing balls of fire, telling of the presence of some wild and savage animal.

The walk through the forest was at least half a mile in length, and then the trees began to be more thinly scattered.

There were some signs of civilization, too, for they passed a field of maize or Indian corn, which, however, unlike all else around it, looked withered and parched.

Harry could not help noticing its appearance, and asked Raymond what was the meaning of it.

"It looks half eaten up," said he.

"It is eaten up," returned his companions. "The *chapulin*, or, as it is sometimes called, the *lungosta*, has been here with a vengeance."

"What is the *chapulin*?" inquired the lad, who had never heard the name before.

"It's a sort of locust or flying grasshopper, and a great glutton it is too. A swarm will think nothing of clearing a field of maize in a few hours. They always select the hottest places and the lowest levels. They're very rarely seen on the high table-lands."

"Do you notice," said Harry, curiously, "how those fellows are looking at us, and then at the maize?"

No, Captain Raymond had not observed it; but on watching the Indians he found it was as Harry had said.

Their captors were evidently talking about them, and connecting them in some way with the field of maize.

Whatever could it mean?

"I don't understand this," said the captain, at last. "There's something very strange; but what it is I can't for the life of me make out."

Fortunate for them it was they did not know, or they would not have gone along so cheerfully.

By-and-by they left the maize fields, and entered another forest almost as dense as the other.

After proceeding about two hundred yards, they suddenly came upon an immense wall, at least twelve or fourteen feet high, and immensely thick.

It was overgrown with moss and all kinds of plants, and in some parts the parapet had decayed and fallen down.

The leader passed through a narrow opening half hidden by bushes, and the rest followed one by one.

Harry expected to see a wonderful sight when he reached the other side of the wall.

He had conjured up in his mind a splendid city full of marble palaces, white and glittering in the sun, and wide and spacious streets thronged with people.

To his disappointment he found nothing but a narrow passage running between two high walls, and only wide enough for three men to walk abreast.

"Is this the wondrous buried city you told me of?" he inquired of Raymond.

"Yes," returned the latter; "but wait awhile. These are only the outer walls; we shall soon get inside."

The passage appeared to curve considerably, and the walls seemed to enclose the town within a circle.

Many years must have passed over those walls since they were first built.

Trees and shrubs had taken root in all directions; creepers, ferns and mosses covered their sides in almost every part, and the whole looked ruinous and neglected.

As far as they could tell, the city seemed surrounded by three of these circular walls, for on passing through an opening in the third the prisoners found themselves in a tolerably clear space.

It had once been paved with stone, for fragments lay strewed about among the luxuriant weeds, which had long made the ground their dwelling-place.

It looked the very picture of desolation, and Harry could not help a feeling of gloom and sadness come over him as he gazed around.

"This is not quite what we expected, Harry—is it?" said Raymond.

"No, indeed," replied the lad shuddering.

"And yet it is quite natural," returned the captain.

"Shut out from all their neighbors for so many hundreds of years, they have descended from intelligent beings almost into brutes."

"They have suffered their city to decay, and without any ambition but that of separating themselves from the world, they have lived and died. I only hope," he added to himself, "that their religion has not changed."

According to what we know of the religion of the ancient Toltecs, it was as mild and humane as that of the Aztecs, who followed them, was cruel and blood-thirsty.

This indeed was the only thing which troubled Raymond, and of which he had not spoken to Harry.

If the religion of these Guatosos (for he no longer doubted they had been captured by this mysterious race) had become corrupted by gross superstition as their city had become overrun with weeds, who could tell the fate to which he and Harry were doomed?

But he had no time just now to speculate over this, for an exclamation from the lad startled him.

"Look there!" exclaimed Harry, pointing right ahead. "What is that?"

Peeping between the trees could be seen part of an immense building, the top of which seemed to rise in the air to a vast height.

As well as they could make out for the trees which interrupted their view, it appeared to be situated on a hill, and the side which was presented to them had great many entrances, and in appearance was not unlike an arcade.

At the eastern end was a square tower which rose some twenty feet higher than the rest of the building

and on it they could see some figures had been sculptured.

As they drew nearer they found that an immense flight of stone steps, once polished, led up to the building, and extended its whole length.

These steps were very steep, and in many places shattered and decayed.

Trees and shrubs had long since forced their way from between the masonry, and in some parts the steps were nothing but a mass of ruins.

Up these stairs the Indians climbed, taking, however, the precaution to send up their prisoners first.

Half choked with dust, and hot and tired with the exertion of climbing, the latter reached the top and found themselves on a broad terrace.

The sun was just setting, and a most gorgeous landscape was stretched out below.

But they were not allowed to admire it, for they were hurried by the Indians through one of the openings in the building into a corridor which seemed to run entirely round it.

On all sides were hideous figures and ornaments, some carved in stone, others painted on the walls in rude colors; but Raymond had scarcely time to look at them before he found himself with Harry forced into the building through a doorway leading from the corridor.

They were then hurried up another flight of stairs into an apartment which seemed at first as black as midnight, but through the roof of which, when their eyes got accustomed to the gloom, they could see a few rays of the setting sun.

Here they were left, and the Indians, placing on the floor a supply of food, went out of the chamber, and closed the entrance by rolling a large stone in front of it.

For the first moment or two the darkness seemed to overwhelm them, and when they saw the Indians roll the stone in front of the door, it was just as if all hope had been cut off.

Harry was the first to break silence.

"Well, captain," said he, drawing a deep breath, "what's to be done now? We're nicely caged."

"You're right," returned Raymond, bitterly; "and what's more, our wires are too tough to be broken through in a hurry."

However, it was no use repining, and when the first feeling of despair passed away, their active minds immediately set to work to plan a means of escape.

"The first thing we must do is to take stock of our prison," said Raymond.

Carefully they felt the walls with their hands, and as near as they could judge, it was an apartment about forty feet long by twenty feet wide.

On the walls they could feel some elevations which they took to be carvings, and in each corner was a monstrous stone figure.

How high each figure was they could not of course determine; but with their hands clasped, they could only measure half its girth.

The roof was supported by innumerable pillars arranged in rows, and the pillars, like the walls, were covered with ornamental carving.

But not a door or means of escape of any kind did they discover, although they spent three long hours in examination.

"Let us wait till the morning," at last said Raymond, tired out. "Perhaps we shall have a little more light then."

Harry agreed, and both having made a good supper off the fruit left by the Indians, they laid themselves down at the foot of one of the pillars, and were soon fast asleep.

How long Harry had been asleep he could not tell, but at some time or other of the night he heard, or fancied he heard, some one singing.

The voice was very low and sweet, but the melody was wild and mournful.

Between sleeping and waking, he sat up and rubbed his eyes, but the voice had ceased.

"I must have been dreaming," he thought to himself.

He listened intently, but heard not a sound; and at last, satisfied the singing he had heard must have been in a dream, he once more lay down.

But he had not closed his eyes more than five minutes before his sharp ear detected a slight noise in the chamber, as of a footstep.

He pushed Raymond slightly, but the latter was too sound asleep to awaken easily.

The next instant he could see a light hovering about between the pillars, and from the fantastic shadows which kept crossing each other, it was evident some one was walking with a light in his hand.

Thoughts of savage Indians, armed with all sorts of horrid weapons, instantly darted into his mind.

"They are come to murder us," he thought to himself, "and Raymond is asleep."

He was about to awaken his companion, when he suddenly caught sight of the person carrying the light, and this caused him to alter his mind; and quickly laying himself down again, he pretended to be asleep.

What he saw was nothing very dreadful, for it was only an Indian girl carrying a light in her hand.

Nearer and nearer she came, treading so lightly that had it not been for the knowledge of her presence, he would never have suspected anybody beside Raymond was in the chamber.

Soon she came within a few yards, and the lad cautiously opened one of his eyes a little way, and cast a look at the new-comer.

She was about thirteen years of age, but was full grown—for thirteen in tropical climates is equal to seventeen or eighteen in our colder countries—and very beautiful.

She was dressed in a robe made of some kind of native material light as azure, studded with ornaments of gold.

Around her waist she had a cotton sash, or *maxtall*, as

it is called in Mexico, dyed in the most brilliant while floating from her shoulders was a lighter substance than her dress.

She had bracelets and a necklace of turquoise, and a chaplet of pearls bound her dark, glossy hair. In the center of her forehead was a piece of *chalchintli*—a green stone highly prized by the ancient Mexicans—suspended by a fine gold band to the chaplet.

In her hand she held a light, which was more European in form than anything Harry had yet seen.

Appearing, as she did, so suddenly, and surrounded on all sides by the strangely carved pillars, made all the more hideous by being but half revealed by the flickering light, she looked like a being of another world.

Harry held his breath as she came near, and closed his eyes firmly, when she waved the light for an instant across their bodies.

She seemed to have been near them a quarter of an hour, although, in reality, it was scarcely half a minute, and then he knew by the lessened light that she was going away.

He opened his eyes and saw her light, graceful figure gliding between a row of pillars.

He waited until he had lost sight of her, although he could still see the wavering of the light; and then, rising to his feet, he ran softly after her, keeping well within the shadows of the pillars.

CHAPTER XXII.

A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

WHY Harry hastened after the Indian girl may be easily understood.

The three hours' close examination he had, with Raymond, made of the apartment, decided them there was no open door than the one through which they had first entered.

Other entrances there might be, but they were at all events closed.

When Harry saw the girl, he knew she could not have come in through the door heading to the corridor, because it was out of the question to suppose she was able to move the huge stone which the Indians had there placed.

She must have entered by another door, and it was very important to know where the door was situated.

All this rushed through the lad's mind while he was pretending to be asleep, and he resolved, directly she moved away, to follow her, and see where she went to.

He crept as softly as he could past the carved pillars, and kept his eye on the light in the distance.

"I must make haste," he thought, "or I shall be too late."

He had but three pillars to pass before he should catch sight of that part of the chamber where he fancied the girl was, and he resolved to hide behind the last one.

He hastened forward, and just had time to secrete himself in the shadow.

Cautiously he strained his neck, and gave a hurried glance round.

In the corner was monstrous stone figure, with a head made so hideous by the tongue lolling out that the lad fairly shuddered.

The base of the figure was about four feet square, and standing close to it was the Indian girl.

She had her arm resting on part of the monument, and was as motionless as the marble itself.

Suddenly she began to sing in that low, sweet voice which Harry instantly recognized as having heard, as he fancied, in a dream, and the lad thought he had never listened to anything half so beautiful.

She sang in such soft tones that Harry was tempted to put his head out in order to hear more distinctly.

He was listening, enraptured with the sweetness of the music; when, to his amazement, he fancied he could distinguish one or two words of Spanish.

"Impossible," he thought to himself. "How could anybody, shut up as this girl has been, know anything of Spanish?"

Strange, however, as it was, he was certain it was Spanish he heard, and after a bit he could make out the whole of the song.

Whether he had made a slight noise or no, he could not tell, but all at once the girl withdrew her arm from the marble, and looked hurriedly around.

A frightened expression came over her face, and with a rapid movement she put out the light, and they were plunged in a darkness so intense that for a moment Harry felt absolutely afraid to move.

A sudden click in the direction of the monument aroused him.

He darted forward, and his hand touched the cold marble of which the figure was composed.

Was it fancy, or did they really see it move?

He could not tell.

Of one thing, however, he was certain—the girl had disappeared.

Beyond the clicking sound he had heard nothing, but he could not persuade himself she had passed him.

He put out his hands and groped about, but it was all in vain.

They grasped but empty air.

"How strange!" he murmured to himself. "Where can she have gone?"

He felt very disappointed, for he had reckoned upon finding a means of escape.

That hope was now gone, at least for the present, and he could do no more than find his way back to Raymond.

"I'd better keep as close to the wall as I can," he thought to himself. "If I don't I shall be continually running my head against these pillars."

Cautiously he proceeded, and for a few yards went on in perfect safety.

The darkness and silence were terrible, and though the lad had a stout heart he could not help feeling some

fear; but had you asked him of what he was afraid, he could not have told you.

"If I did not know it was not so, I should have said the floor was covered with holes," he thought to himself. "Every time I put my foot down, I could almost fancy I was going to tumble down some deep place."

Scarcely had he said the words before he felt himself falling.

He put out his hands to save himself, but it was of no use: he fell forwards, striking his head violently as he did so.

It was more of a scramble than a direct fall; and though the time occupied was but a second or two, he was perfectly conscious of his arms and legs touching some hard substance or other as he went down.

But after that all was a blank, for he became senseless.

How long he remained so he could not tell, but when he came to himself he found he was sitting in a kind of well, for there was hard earth on every side, while it seemed to him as if he could hear the sound of running water.

"How did I come here?" he asked himself, hurriedly. "Are you there, captain?" he added.

Then he remembered all at once his fall and the song of the Indian girl, and he strove to rise to his feet.

But every bone in his body seemed to ache, and then he knew he must have hurt himself severely.

His head, too, pained him badly, and for a minute or two he felt quite sick.

After laying quietly for a little while, his strength seemed to return, and by degrees he struggled to his feet.

With dizzy head he leaned against the wall, and tried to collect his scattered thoughts.

Where was he? That was a mystery he could not solve.

"I cannot have fallen a very great height," he thought to himself, "or surely I must have broken some bones, and I don't think I've done that."

He lifted up his arms, but found no difficulty in so doing; and as for his legs—why the fact that he was standing upon his feet was proof enough of his soundness.

"Thank heaven, they are all right," said he at last; "and if I could only be sure I've got nothing worse than a few bruises, I should be tolerably comfortable. When Raymond wakes and misses me from his side, he'll be sure to go in search."

The only question was—how far was he away from the floor of the apartment?

He lifted up his hands as high as he could, but they only encountered the smooth wall.

On one side, however, he found the surface was very rough.

Fragments of stone stuck out from the wall, and from the feel he came to the conclusion that at some time or other steps probably had been built in it.

The broken stones, too, which formed the ground on which he was standing, certainly favored his idea, and at last he decided that he had fallen down a staircase, which, either from age or accident had given way.

"Whatever could it have been used for?" he thought to himself. "And then the trickling of water—where does that come from?"

He moved his feet cautiously, for he could not tell whether he was really standing on the bottom of the well, (as we may call it, for want of a better name), or whether he was not supported by some of the masonry which had fallen from the staircase, and got wedged between the walls.

While he was pondering over his extraordinary situation, he suddenly heard a footstep on the pavement above.

Instantly his heart gave a great bound, for he thought it could be no other than his companion searching for him.

He listened intently, and then to his great joy he heard the well-known voice of Raymond shouting "Harry!"

Rising up, and losing all sense of pain in the joy of the moment he called out "Here I am, captain."

"Where?" called out the captain from above.

"Down here," he answered. "Be careful, for heaven's sake. I've fallen down some dark place or other."

Guided by his voice, Raymond groped his way to the spot, and soon, to Harry's relief, he heard him stop on the edge of the pit and speak to him.

"Why, how on earth came you down here, and whatever place have you got into?" he asked.

"That's more than I can tell," replied the lad; "all I know is that I nearly broke every bone in my body."

"You've not hurt yourself very much, have you?" inquired Raymond, anxiously.

"Well, nothing serious I believe, but plenty of bruises," returned Harry.

Captain Raymond was reassured by the lad's cheery tones, and he asked how deep he thought the hole was.

"I don't know. I can't reach the edge at all events."

Raymond laid himself on the ground, and put his hand over the edge of the pit as far as he could reach.

"Now," said he, "see if you can touch my hand."

Harry stretched his arm out, and to his great joy found he could clasp the captain's easily.

"Get round on the opposite side," said he to Raymond. "That side is very rough, and I shall easily find a foothold."

His companion did so, and by the aid of a rough surface, and assisted by the captain's hands, Harry managed to scrambled up, and once more stood upon the floor of the apartment.

He was rather exhausted when he reached the top, but this arose from the severe shaking his fall had given him, and in a very little time he was able to answer Raymond's question's as to how he came into the hole.

"I've got a good deal to tell you, and what's more, I believe we shall find our way out of this place before long. In the first place, I've found out there's another entrance to this room."

"Well—yes, you've found that out with a vengeance," replied Raymond.

"Oh, I don't mean that hole, although there's something very curious about that too. The entrance I was thinking about is quite different. And how I found it out was the strangest thing that ever happened. You listen to me a little while, and tell me if you don't think so."

Raymond did listen, and when Harry had concluded, was forced to admit his story was a very strange one.

"Are you certain the girl sung in Spanish?" he asked.

"I'm positive of it, or how could I have told what she was singing about?" rejoined Harry.

"And also that you felt the monument move?"

"Well, I could almost swear I did. She certainly did not come in through the door where the stone is, and I never heard a sound of her after that clicking noise."

"Well, suppose we go and see if we can find it?" said Raymond.

"All right," returned the lad. "I believe I could find my way back."

Keeping close to the wall as before, the two carefully made their way back towards the monument, Harry retracing his steps as nearly as possible.

After some little searching about, they discovered themselves near the great stone idol.

Choosing a part near as he could judge where he saw the Indian girl last, he pointed it out to Raymond, and they both exerted all their strength against the side of the pedestal in the hope that the fastening of the door might give way.

But no; it firmly resisted all their efforts, and at last they gave up their attempts in despair.

"There must be a fastening somewhere, said Raymond. "Let us see if we can find it."

They carefully felt the stone surface, but although they tried to press down any part which seemed to be more elevated than the rest, nothing seemed at all movable, and this, also, was given up.

"Well," said Raymond at last, "it's no use, I'm afraid; but there's one consolation, if we're not moved from this room, perhaps the girl will pay us another visit, and if she does, we'll be a little sharper. We'd better go back to our old quarters, for daylight has come some time, and our goaler may give us a call."

Looking round, Harry saw the rays of the morning sun had forced their way through a chink and cranny here and there in the roof, and though there was hardly light enough to see each other, yet the sunbeams, few as they were, inspired him with hope.

Slowly they went back to the spot where the Indians had left them, and resumed their positions as if they were sleeping.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TO THE SACRIFICE.

THE Teo-callis, or "houses of God," of the ancient Mexicans were immense temples of so curious a shape that once seen they could never be forgotten.

They were solid masses of earth, cased with stone or brick, and about a hundred feet square at the lowest part.

From ruins which have been found in different parts of Mexico and Central America, people first supposed that these temples were simply natural hillocks built in with bricks; but it is now generally believed that they are entirely artificial mounds constructed in the way I have described.

They consisted, as a rule, of four or five stories, each one smaller than the one below it.

Running round the outside of each story was a terrace or gallery of stairs, placed in such a manner that to reach the top of the "teo-calli" one had to go completely round the building once, if not twice.

These were the only temples which Raymond, in his journey through Mexico, had seen; and he was a little puzzled when he saw the building in which they now were, for he could not determine whether it was a palace or a temple.

He did not know that in some of the old temples the staircase led directly up to the highest part.

The stairs were always facing the west, and on the top was a broad open space, from which, at either end of the building, rose a square tower forty or fifty feet high.

This, you will remember, was the shape of the building in which Harry and Raymond were imprisoned, the only difference being that there was but one tower instead of two.

As a great part of the building was decayed, it was, however, very possible the second tower had long ago fallen into ruins.

Thus it was certain, although Raymond did not know it, they were confined in the temple of the Guatosos.

The two companions had not laid themselves down after their failure to discover another entrance more than a few minutes, before they heard voices outside.

"Here they are," said Raymond.

There was more talking, and by-and-by the stone was rolled away a little, and a young Indian came in, bringing some food with him.

The youth—for he was scarcely more than a youth—was dressed in a loose garment, and was gaily decorated with flowers.

The youth's behavior was not like that of a jailer to his prisoner.

It was more like that of a host towards some honored guest.

Both Raymond and Harry were treated with great respect, and waited upon as if he had been their servant.

"Well," said Harry at last, "this is the most comical way of treating prisoners that I ever heard of. I

this is the way they serve their enemies, I wonder how their friends get on?"

"We haven't got to the end of their treatment yet," returned Raymond, in a peculiar voice.

"Why, what do you mean?" inquired Harry, almost alarmed by Raymond's tone.

"Well, my dear lad, I did not intend to tell you unless it was absolutely necessary; but there is no use delaying bad news which must come sooner or later."

Harry looked anxiously at his companion.

"Bad news?" he repeated.

"Yes; but they can be told in a few words. Unless we escape within the next two days, we shall find our last resting-place on the altar of the Guatosos."

Harry gazed at his companion's face in mute terror. There was something so awful in the meaning of the words that he could not speak.

"You remember my hinting to you my fears when we were taken prisoners?"

"Yes—I do, indeed; but as you had said nothing about it since, I had hoped you were mistaken."

"No, I was not sure when we were brought here what this building was, but now that I have seen those idols, and this lad dressed in flowers, I fear the worst," he rejoined.

"Why, what can the flowers have to do with it?" asked Harry, astonished.

"Well, I'll tell you. First of all, the chief god of the ancient Mexicans—from whom the people we are amongst are descended—was the god of war. In all their battles they never cared so much about killing their enemies as about taking prisoners; and of course when the unfortunate captives were brought home they were sacrificed to the gods in a horrid and cruel fashion."

"Ay, I remember you said that when we were fighting these fellows," said Harry.

"But they went farther than this. It was their belief that the souls of those who died in battle went directly to the sun. The sun, you must know, is the heaven of the Mexicans, and if we could have gone out this morning when the sun was rising, we should have seen the Indians on their house-tops kneeling and praying, with their faces turned to the east. They believed the spirits remained in the mansions of the sun for some years, and then went to animate the bodies of singing birds of the most gorgeous plumage, and to live in lovely gardens filled with the most beautiful flowers."

"Then I suppose that was the reason why those Indians did not mind our guns? I thought it was rather curious."

"Yes, death they do not fear at all. Why, sometimes it used to be thought an honor to submit to be sacrificed by the priest. On very great occasions they used to choose the handsomest youth they could find, treat him luxuriantly with everything he could wish for and then put him to death. There was generally a procession of priests, who were attended by a number of boys and youths decorated with all kinds of beautiful flowers, and these accompanied the victim through the city to the altar, which was always in some place where the ceremony could be seen by all the inhabitants."

"Then you think," said Harry, turning pale at the idea, "this young Indian is one of the priests' attendants?"

"Yes, I've no doubt about it," returned the captain, gravely.

Meanwhile the Indian, who had gone out while Raymond and Harry were talking, returned, and made signs for them to get up and follow him.

"What shall we do?" asked Harry of his companion.

"We must obey—there's no help for it; but we must keep our eyes open as well," he replied.

They rose from the ground and followed their guide into the corridor, where an immense gathering of priests and boys was assembled.

When the two prisoners came out, everybody turned their eyes curiously upon them, and at a signal from one of the priests, a number of boys began to play on some rude musical instruments.

It sounded very harsh, but the melody was rather joyful than sad.

"How terrible these priests look!" whispered Harry, placing his arm within his companion's.

Yes, they were indeed terrible.

There were at least fifty of them, and all wore robes of black, descending from the shoulders to their feet.

They had suffered their hair to grow; and as it was never tended, it hung down in ragged, matted locks, which almost gave their faces an expression like that of wild beasts.

When the music struck up, the priests formed themselves into a procession, Harry and Raymond being placed in the center, with a couple of priests on each side.

Behind came at least a hundred boys, all of them in white, and covered with garlands of flowers, while a band of some fifty chosen warriors brought up the rear.

"Keep up your courage, my boy," whispered Raymond. "We don't know what may turn up."

"I'm not afraid, captain," returned Harry; "but I've made up my mind to give them a little trouble before they offer me up to their god. After all," he added, sadly, "Phil's was the best fate. He hadn't got the dreadful suspense which we have to endure."

"You're right," returned the captain, emphatically.

They had not time to say any more, for at that moment the procession began to move.

It slowly wound out of one of the doors of the corridor on to the terrace in front, and as it did so the instruments ceased, and the boys commenced to chant a mournful strain.

It was a lovely sight which met the eyes of the two captives when they stepped out into the open air.

The glorious sun shone brilliantly over the landscape.

Far away in the distance stretched a mighty forest, whose many tints (for it was, you remember, the commencement of the dry season, and the scorching effect of the sun was beginning to be felt) gave a wondrous glow to the scene.

On each side the temple trees were growing, and the ever-present creeping plants, the convolvulus and the passion-flower, covered the trunk, and hung down in wild profusion.

Slowly the procession passed along the terrace, and commenced to descend the steps, stretching the whole width of the western end of the building.

As they got lower and lower, Harry could hear a confused murmur as of a crowd of people, and the sound made him clasp Raymond's arm tighter, for it seemed

Golden Island, he told him he had an object in getting rich, but did not say what that object was.

The explanation, however, was very easy. It was simply this, that when he was in England nearly three years before, he had fallen in love. The lady, unfortunately, was as poor as himself, and marriage was out of the question.

Determining to adopt the most speedy method, as he fancied, of getting over the difficulty, he set out for the California gold fields.

But, as he told Harry in the conversation after the adventure with the electric eel, he had been unsuccessful, and this had decided him to go in search of the Golden Island, the existence of which had been made known to him by the manuscript of the old buccancer.



The leader of the party at once pushed the bushes aside and entered the forest, followed by the others.

to him as though the tone which the breeze bore to him was one of anger.

"Did you hear that?" he whispered.

Raymond bowed his head.

He knew it meant that the people were waiting to see them brought out, and the thought that he was powerless and could not raise a hand to help himself was unspeakable torture. He was not afraid of dying, for he had faced death too many times to have that fear; but to be put to death in cold blood was more than he could bear. Give him a weapon and a fair field and he would show them how a brave man could die.

But besides this there were other thoughts which gave him more agony than anything else.

What had led him to go in search of the Golden Island? Was it for the gold itself? No; something far higher than that.

When he first said anything to Harry about the

What his feelings must have been then, under the circumstances, as he walked in that dreadful procession of sacrifice, can scarcely be imagined.

But he said nothing to Harry. No, he thought to himself, why make the lad's trouble worse by giving him any of his own? And so he kept his secret within his own breast.

Slowly and with difficulty the procession made its way down the ruinous steps, and louder and louder came the murmur and din of the multitude.

Parting the bushes which overgrew the lowest stairs, the leader of the priests led the way into a thick grove of cypress trees, the darkness of which threw an awful feeling of gloom over the hearts of the two prisoners.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RESPIRE.

The music grew softer and more solemn as the pro-

cession entered the grove, and the slow steps of the priest kept time to the melody.

Presently the procession emerged into daylight, and as it did so, the instruments gave a wild blast, and the priests and youths burst out into a song of joy, which was taken up by a thousand voices a little distance off.

A few houses now began to be seen, and in three or four minutes' time the procession was right in the heart of the town.

The streets were thronged with people, all of them gazing curiously on the captives, while a few threw handfuls of flowers on the procession as it passed.

The houses were not nearly so magnificent as Harry had been led to expect.

Some indeed, there were which were large and spacious; but these looked very old and decayed.

The greater part were small, mean-looking buildings, built chiefly of brick baked in the sun, and nothing at all handsome about them.

What struck Harry the most were the curious figures which were carved outside some of the older and larger houses.

They were all frightfully ugly, with monstrous heads and absurdly small and misshapen bodies.

There appeared to be writing, too, on the outside of some of the buildings; but the signs were the most curious one could imagine.

Nearly every letter was composed of a face distorted, and with a horrible expression, while a great many were daubed with bright colors.

The long procession wound in and out the streets, and in each a crowd of people, full of curiosity, had gathered.

Soon it seemed to be wending its way back, but not by the same path; for although the prisoners could see the temple, it was not the same side from which they had set out.

"What are they going to do now?" said Harry, who had never let go his grasp on Raymond's arm; for, surrounded as they were by foes, the mere touch of the one or the other seemed to inspire both with confidence.

"Most likely we shall be taken back to the temple," returned Raymond.

"And then?" said Harry, in a voice which he strove to calm.

"And then the end will come," replied his companion turning away his head.

Even in that fearful moment they did not lose heart.

Of escape they could see no chance, but each firmly resolved he would not submit to the knife of the priest without a struggle.

Once more the procession ascended the steps, but it was at the other end of the staircase, and Raymond saw they were approaching the tower which, you will remember, was situated at one extremity of the building.

He looked up, and a shudder ran through him; for on the roof of the temple itself, and but a few yards from the tower, was a square block, the purpose of which he guessed too truthfully.

It was the sacrificial stone!

But he never said a word to Harry, for he knew the lad would know quite soon enough.

By-and-by the procession entered the temple, and as it did so Raymond looked round and saw the space in front was filled with people who had crowded after the procession, and were eager to witness the dreadful sight.

They entered the temple at quite a different door from the one which led to their apartment of the previous night, and the priests, followed by the captives, ascended a long narrow flight of stairs.

It led up to the roof of the temple, which Raymond found was quite flat.

Opposite to the sacrificial stone, which was a huge block of jasper, the top being slightly raised towards the center, and started off at the sides, the procession stopped, and the boys and priests chanting a solemn dirge.

At the sound of their voices a priest stepped out from a door in the tower, and held up his hands towards the sun.

He was dressed entirely in red garments, and his hair was long and matted like that of the others.

In his right hand he held a knife, while he muttered something in a harsh, guttural voice.

Whether it was a command or not, Raymond did not know, but five priests stood out from the rest and drew near him.

At that moment he heard the sound of a voice, clear and silvery as a bell.

It came from the tower, and looking round he saw a beautiful girl standing within the doorway, and addressing herself in commanding tones to the priest.

Harry also heard her voice, and instantly recognized it.

It was that of their mysterious visitor of the previous night!

"It was she who sang," he whispered to Raymond.

"Hush!" returned his companion; "she is saying something to the priest."

Whatever it was it had a marvelous effect.

The priest let his hands fall, and saying a few words in a loud voice to the assembled crowd, moved slowly towards the tower, followed by the five priests.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Harry.

"I can't tell, but I think it bodes good to us," replied Raymond.

In a few minutes' time the priest in the scarlet robes reappeared from the tower, and advancing towards the edge of the terrace, addressed himself to the people, turning round as he spoke, and pointing to the two captives.

The crowd evidently did not wholly approve of what the priest said, for there was a low murmur of dissent.

But a moment after, the girl came from the tower, and, with flashing eyes and in a voice that sent a thrill through the hearts of the two prisoners, said something which quite altered their minds.

Slowly they dispersed, and at a signal from the chief priest the procession moved along the terrace, and entered the corridor.

"Well, we're safe for another day!" exclaimed Raymond.

"Yes; and we have to thank that girl for it, I'm quite sure. Though why she should take an interest in us, I know not," said Harry.

The captives were led once more into their former apartment; but, strange to say, the entrance was left unclosed.

For a few minutes the two remained quiet, expecting to receive a visit from some of the Indians; but no one came, and all the long procession seemed to have separated.

"As our friends have been kind enough to leave the door open, would there be any harm in us taking a stroll?" observed Raymond, who was anxious, as far as he could, to ascertain the bearings of his prison.

Harry agreed, and they passed out of the temple and stood on the terrace.

Three or four of the lads who had lately formed part of the procession were standing about; but beyond a few curious glances, they took no notice of the prisoners.

The latter went down the steps in front of the temple, and reached the open space which had so lately been filled by a crowd of sightseers.

"Do they mean to let us escape?" inquired Harry, anxiously.

"Scarcely, I should think," replied Raymond. "It's all very well to let us wander about when they know we have that high wall to get over, and an unknown country to pass through. But in spite of that, we must have our eyes about us."

They strolled over the ground, and met several of the inhabitants, but none interfered with them.

Soon they reached the cypress grove which they had gone through at an earlier part of the day.

They passed the entrance, and made their way as near as they could for the wall, which they knew was somewhere in that direction.

They entered a thicket, and at once found themselves in a fragment of the forest which, near as it was to the town, was in a perfectly wild state.

It had, in fact, been neglected in accordance with some superstitious feeling, and, indeed, was rarely traversed by anyone with the exception of the priests and their attendants.

As the two strolled along they talked about the chances of their escape.

At present they could see no way open to them, but at last came to the conclusion that the best thing would be to make a thorough search of the chamber that evening.

They were very much puzzled at the conduct of the Indian girl, but could not help thinking she was in some way their friend.

"And perhaps we shall have another visit from her to-night," said Harry.

As he pronounced the words, he heard a cry of terror among the trees ahead of him.

"What was that?" he asked.

But before his companion could reply, the cry came again, and without giving himself time to think, Harry darted forward and dashed into the bushes.

The scene which met his eyes was one terrible enough to appal a much stouter heart than Harry's; for, curled round a tree, its immense body coiled in masses about the trunk, was a hideous boa-constrictor, while, crouching on the ground, half paralyzed with fear, was the Indian girl.

The head of the serpent was extended towards its victim, and its hideous mouth was gaping wide.

Harry felt that not a moment was to be lost, and, giving but one glance round, saw a weapon ready to hand.

It was a club which had evidently been shaped by some one, for the twigs and leaves had been stripped off.

Seizing this he swung it round and brought it down with terrific force on the head of the reptile.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE QUEEN OF THE GUATOSOS.

HARRY's arrival was only just in time, for the next instant the snake would have flung itself round the poor girl's body.

The first blow had by no means killed it, and a second time Harry brought his club round and struck it on the back, which had the effect of crushing the bone, and paralyzing it downwards to the tail.

The monstrous coils were slowly relaxed and the immense creature dropped on to the ground incapable of further movement. A few strokes with the knife, and the danger was past.

By this time Raymond was at Harry's side, and the two raised the terrified girl from the ground.

She gave them a grateful look from her large dark eyes, and murmured in Spanish a few words of thanks.

"There," said Harry to his companion in English, "what did I tell you? Does she not speak Spanish?"

Greatly surprised, Raymond spoke to her in that language, and she replied, but with some little hesitation, showing that the words did not come readily to her tongue.

Raymond began to ask her some questions, for the thought dawned upon him that if this girl was friendly inclined towards them they might by her means effect their escape.

She had, however, scarcely time to reply, before a file of Indian warriors, accompanied by a couple of priests, suddenly appeared from between the trees.

"Do you see that?" whispered Raymond. "They haven't allowed us to be out of their sight, you may depend upon it. If we do make our escape it must be in the night."

Directly the girl saw the priests, she assumed the

same commanding tone which had had so much influence over the people a few hours before.

She seemed to be explaining what had occurred, for she pointed to the dead boa-constrictor, then to herself, and then to Harry, and talked rapidly and excitedly the whole time.

The soldiers, and even the priests, appeared to pay her the utmost respect; but with all their respect, it was evident the girl could not do exactly what she liked.

Possibly she was bound in some way by the rules of their religion, for after her story was finished, she bowed to the sun, and slowly moved away from the two prisoners, but not before she had, in a soft, meaning tone, said to them in Spanish: "Lola may see them once more."

Followed by the priests, she left the place, while the soldiers, closing round Harry and Raymond, made signs that they were to accompany them.

Back they went towards the temple. Again they ascended the ruined steps, and once more they were in the chamber in which they had been confined the previous night.

Some fruit was placed on the ground, and the stone, as before, rolled in front of the entrance.

The words of the Indian girl seemed still to be sounding in Harry's ears, and do what he could, he was forever hearing her soft musical voice.

"Captain," said he at last, "I believe that girl is going to turn out our friend, and I should not be surprised if she pays us another visit to-night."

"Yes," replied Raymond, who had been buried in thought and silent ever since they had been in their prison. "I've been trying to find out, Harry, why it is these fellows pay her so much respect, and why it is she speaks Spanish. I shouldn't wonder, now, if she were not a Guatoso at all. Most likely she's been stolen."

"Stolen?" repeated Harry.

"Yes, who can tell? She may have been taken when very young from her family by these Indians, and brought up as one of their own race? At all events, if she does come to-night, I mean to ask her."

"But wouldn't she forget all about her Spanish, living with these people so long?" objected the lad.

"Well, she isn't more than thirteen at the outside," returned the captain; "and supposing she were taken away at four or five years old—and she would not be younger than that, or she would not have learned to speak her native language—that, would not have been so very long ago."

Harry agreed that this might be very likely.

"I fancy," said Raymond, musingly, "she must be a Mexican. She has all the look of one."

"Well, suppose she is. You said all these people came from Mexico originally," said the lad.

"Yes, but I mean that this girl comes from the modern Mexico—the Mexico of to-day. I lived in that city some few months, and saw many faces exactly like this girl's."

"Well, we shall see to-night, for I feel positive she will come," returned Harry.

By this time the apartment had become quite dark.

It was towards evening when they had returned, and while they were speaking, the night had suddenly come on, and they were in utter darkness.

They ate their supper, and waited impatiently for their visitor.

Never did time seem so long; the minutes were like hours, and every now and then the two captives would pace up and down their chamber, taking care, however, not to approach the side where Harry had met with his mishap the night before.

At least three hours passed, but she came not, and Raymond began to despair.

Harry, however, was still hopeful; and as, for about the fiftieth time, they were walking to and fro, he suddenly stopped, and putting his ear to the ground, listened intently.

"There's a footstep, I'm sure," he whispered; "and it's coming nearer."

Was it she? There was no light to indicate her presence, but Harry and Raymond knew no other foot but that of the young girl could have fallen so lightly on the stone pavement.

Another minute, and they were conscious—how, they knew not—of the presence of some one besides themselves in the chamber.

"Senors," they heard, in a low, soft voice.

"Here we are," called out Harry, in Spanish.

"Hush!" said the girl. "Speak low; we know not who may be near."

"Why, is there anybody here beside yourself?" asked Raymond, in a low tone.

"No," returned the girl hurriedly. "But you are in a place of mystery, and it is with great risk that I come. The light I brought last night was seen, and I am afraid these cruel people may suspect something."

"Then you do not belong to them?" asked Raymond.

"No, senor. I am a Mexican, and my father and mother—if, alas, they are still alive—are in my own beautiful city."

She sighed as she spoke, and there was a sadness in her tone which went to the heart of her listeners.

"Though I have nearly forgotten my native tongue, I have never forgotten my kindred and friends—but those I shall never see again, unless"—and she stopped.

"Unless what?" asked Harry.

"I know not. When I first saw your faces my heart was filled with a strange yearning; and I thought—But it is vain to tell you my idle thoughts. I am doomed to remain in this dreadful place."

"How came you to visit us last night?" asked Harry, hesitatingly.

"I had seen you brought to the temple, although

you did not see me; and I could not resist coming last night and gazing upon some one who reminded me of my native home.

Of course the girl did not say these exact words, as she spoke in Spanish; but the meaning of them I have tried to give you as well as I can.

Harry's heart fell when he heard this, for he had fancied that she had come to tell them how they might escape.

He was about to say so, when he heard Raymond ask her what the Indians intended to do with them.

There was a tremble in the girl's voice as she answered:

"Have you not guessed? Was not the priest ready with his knife to-day, had I not stayed his hand?"

"You!" exclaimed Harry and Raymond together.

"Yes. But I must tell you my story, or you will not understand. I have already told you that I am a Mexican. My father," she added, in a proud voice, "is a direct descendant of the royal Montezuma, whose family reigned over Mexico for hundreds of years. Better, though, had I been the daughter of the meanest mule-driver; for it is my relationship to the ancient king which has brought me among this people."

"How was that?" asked Raymond.

"Because they had been seeking for many years for a descendant of Montezuma to reign over them, and they thought they had discovered a queen in me. They sent two of their chief men to search, and after many years of toil they at last found out my father, and one day, when I was about five years old, I was carried away and brought here, where I have lived ever since, and where I shall die."

For a few moments the girl paused as if occupied with her own thoughts, but presently went on again.

"It was a long time before I found this out, and they do not know but what I fancy I have lived here all my life; but I shall never forget—never."

"Then you do not believe in their religion—in their human sacrifices?" said the captain.

"Horrible—horrible!" she replied in a low tone. "Oh, the frightful scenes I have witnessed and could not prevent."

"But did we not owe our lives to you this morning?" said Harry, softly.

"Yes, but only for a time. In another week you will once more be led out. I only succeeded in changing the place of sacrifice."

A shudder ran through Raymond's strong frame as he asked:

"And where—where are we now to be put to death?"

"On the sacred Island of Gold!" she replied slowly.

The listeners started violently.

The Island of Gold!

Could that be their Golden Island of which they had come in search?

If it were so, how dearly would they have paid for their knowledge.

The hearts of both were sick, and never at any previous time, in not one of their adventures, had they felt so depressed.

Who could have told they would have been saved many a time from death only to be reserved for a fate like this!

It was terrible, and they could only press each other's hands in silence.

Lola, for such was the girl's name, knew that something had had a strange effect on her companions, and she naturally thought they were cast down by her words; but she did not know the fearful meaning they conveyed.

In a minute or two Harry recovered himself a little.

The boy, as I have said before, was of a very hopeful nature, and after the first impression had passed off his mind began casting about for some plan to escape.

They had a week before them—surely something could be done in that time, especially with the aid of Lola.

"Would you not be glad to get away from this place?" he asked.

"Glad!" repeated the girl.

They could not see her face, but they could tell by her tone that it was the very thing she had been longing for.

"Is there no way?" again said Harry.

"None," she replied in a tone of despair. "The walls are very high, and there are guards always about. Besides who could find their way through the forest?"

"Well I've made up my mind to have a try," returned Harry, "especially if we have a week given to us."

"Will the priests really carry out their intention and take us to the Island of Gold?" asked Raymond anxiously.

"Yes, I'm afraid so," she answered sadly. After a pause, she said: "If you knew the reason why you are to be sacrificed, you would no longer doubt."

"What then is the reason?" demanded the captain.

"It is this: For two years our fields of maize have been eaten up by the *chapulin*, and it was given out by the priests that the plague would never cease until a valuable sacrifice were offered up."

A sudden light came upon Raymond.

This explained the peculiar looks of their captors with respect to Harry and himself when they were passing through the maize fields, which, if you remember, were, as Lola said, eaten up by the locust of Central America, the *chapulin* or *tungosta*.

"They believe you are of a noble race," continued Lola; "and the resistance you made only rendered them more eager to take you prisoners. Every man has sworn to perish rather than let you escape."

"Were they sent out for that purpose?" asked Raymond.

"Yes; the soldiers left here about three months ago, and no one knew when they would come back."

Everybody believes, when the sacrifice has been made the *chapulin* would leave them in peace. At times some of the people have been half starved with famine and sooner than endure the torture of the last season they would do anything."

"Then, indeed, I fear it is as you say—they will carry out their intention," said Raymond sadly.

But Harry was determined not to be cast down so soon, so he asked the girl whether she had ever seen the Golden Island.

"Once," returned Lola with a shudder. "It is only used for very grand festivals, and they have only had one since I have been with them."

"Is it near here?" inquired the lad.

"I can't tell. All I remember is that it is in the middle of an immense lake, underground."

"Underground!" exclaimed Raymond and Harry in astonishment.

"Yes; there are two priests whose business it is to attend to the sacred fire which is there kept burning, and they go to the island once every day," said Lola. "But see!" she exclaimed—"the sun is rising and I am warned to go."

It was indeed so.

The first beams of the sun had penetrated the cracks of the roof, and bidding them adieu, the girl stole away.

When she had got a few paces off, Harry suddenly said:

"Stay one moment—answer this question before you go. Where does the secret passage through which you made your way into this room, lead to?"

"Only to the square tower. There is no escape there," she said, sadly; for she guessed the lad's thoughts.

"You will come to-night—will you not?" beseeched the lad.

The girl promised and laying her finger on her lips hastened away, and was lost in the gloom.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GOLDEN ISLAND!

When the two were left alone, the full sense of their situation came back in all its horrors.

The mysterious words they had just heard filled them with dread, and they sat for some time in silence.

"Well, Harry, my lad, ours has been an unfortunate meeting for you, after all. We have found the Golden Island, but only to give up our lives upon it," said Raymond, sadly.

"Don't talk like that, captain," cried Harry. "I have never regretted meeting you; and as for the Golden Island we haven't got to it yet."

"No; we shall be there soon enough, I'll warrant," replied his companion gloomily.

They had not much heart for talk, and fatigued with want of sleep—for they had sat through the night—they laid down in their old quarters, at the foot of the monument, and closed their eyes—not, however, with the idea of getting rest, for the word now seemed to them but a mockery.

In spite of this, however, tired nature would be obeyed, and soon after they had laid themselves down they were fast asleep, and had forgotten all their misfortunes, for a few short hours at least.

They were awakened by the stone being rolled back, and by the entrance of the young Indian, who brought them some fresh fruit.

He simply placed it on the ground, and, after making a kind of salute, withdrew, and the stone was rolled again into its position.

It did not seem as if they were going to be allowed their liberty that day.

The fruit which had been brought was finer than the captives had seen anywhere during their journey.

There were some splendid bananas, not the shriveled things which one sometimes sees in European cities, but mellow as the finest pear, and nestling in their delicate green leaves, just beginning to be tinged by the northern winds.

There was the delicious fruit of the milk tree, of a bluish color, and of a flavor extremely grateful to the parched throats of the prisoners, while above all there was the exquisite *anone*.

The tree on which the *anone* grows is very mean in appearance, and it is often found in the hedges growing wild.

The fruit has a smooth green rind, covered with singular elevations, like a fish's scales, and is about the size of an apple; but although not very promising in appearance, the flavor is without comparison.

When Raymond saw what had been brought, he exclaimed:

"Well, they treat us like princes, at all events; but it doesn't make our prison a bit more comfortable."

Nevertheless, they enjoyed their breakfast, and, frugal though it was, it seemed to put new life into them.

"Captain," said Harry, about half an hour after they had finished their repast, "I've been thinking we ought to explore that hole in the floor which I slipped into the other night. I'm sure it used to be a staircase, and must have led to somewhere you know."

"Yes, but I don't suppose that will help us much. I can tell you I've thought of plan after plan, and can only see one way of escape."

"And what is that?" asked Harry eagerly.

"By forcing our way through the roof," said Raymond.

"Why, we should never be able to reach it," cried the lad, looking upward as he spoke, to the great blocks of stone which composed the ceiling.

"We'd find a way to do that, I believe," returned the captain. "My only fear is whether we can move any of those pieces of stone when we do reach it."

As he spoke he walked to one of the curiously carved columns supporting the roof, and began to climb it.

The elevations and depressions which had been made in the stone formed capital footholds, and he had no difficulty in making his way to the ceiling.

Harry watched him climb to the top, and force his broad shoulders against a stone which appeared to be loose—that is to say, it did not join its neighbor on one side, and a stream of light came pouring through the crack.

But it was immovable, and after a vain attempt to dislodge it, Raymond gave up his efforts, and rejoined the lad, panting hard from the exertion he had used.

"That was what I meant to do with every pillar in the apartment until I found a stone which was loose," he said:

"And suppose you did not find one?" said Harry.

"Then I meant to loosen one by digging with our knives at the cement," he replied.

"Well, before you begin this, will you try my way first?" asked Harry, earnestly. "I can't tell you how anxious I am to get down that staircase. You'll have a try—won't you?"

"Oh, yes, I'll have a try, of course," replied Raymond, cheerfully; "but, as I tell you, I don't think it will be of much use."

Harry said nothing, but his opinion was not altered, and he was burning to commence removing the stone which choked up the hold.

"The difficulty is," said Raymond, thoughtfully, "how we shall work without being suspected. Of course it would be safe enough in the night, but we can't afford to wait till then."

"Suppose one of us watches while the other works?" suggested Harry.

"Yes, but I expect it will want all our strength, and one won't be enough. Stay, though—I have it. If I go down and hand up the stones to you, you can take them from me and keep watch at the same time."

"Yes, that will do capitally," said Harry, overjoyed. "Besides," he added, "it always takes them five minutes to roll back the stone, and they generally make such a noise that I shall be sure to hear them."

So it was agreed; and this important part of their plan settled, they at once made their way to the staircase.

They had no difficulty in finding it, for it was situated close to one of the walls, and they only had to feel their way cautiously along the stone work.

By a great stroke of fortune, a crack in the roof let down a sunbeam, which just glanced into the hole, and showed them plainly enough its shape and depth.

The top of the cavity was about six feet long by two feet wide, and, as near as they could tell, at least seven feet deep.

It seemed to get narrower the deeper it got, but Raymond discovered the reason of this.

He found, on examining it closely, that the stones forming the steps had been driven into the solid earth which had been shaped in the form of an inclined plane, very steep, of course, but yet sloped at an angle to allow a flight of stairs to be made out of the stones which had been driven into it.

The earth, at some time or other, had given way, and the stones had fallen one on the top of the other, and had now choked up the passageway.

"We've got a hard task before us," said Raymond shaking his head doubtfully.

"Never mind," returned Harry; "if we're not successful before to-morrow morning, I'll give up, and we'll try your plan."

"Agreed," returned the captain, leaping into the hole.

He found the stones on the top could be moved easily enough; but even with his immense strength, it was no light matter to lift them up, especially as he had to stretch his arms to their full extent.

Of course Harry took them from him as well as he could; but from his position the lad could not give his companion very much assistance.

The first stone came up all right, and so did the second and the third, but the fourth came to grief.

Every stone which was removed made the hole deeper, and after three had been taken away, Raymond found, to his dismay, he could no longer reach the top of the hole.

He did not find this out until he was lifting up the fourth stone, and the instant he had got it above his head, he knew Harry would not be strong enough to take it from him.

But the lad had already seized it, and was straining every nerve to drag it up.

In doing so he slipped, and, to save himself from falling, he put out one of his hands.

Of course the stone, relieved from one of its supports, and pressed against on the opposite side by Harry's other hand, toppled over, escaped from Raymond's grasp, and came down with a terrific crash.

Raymond gave a bound in the air, almost knocking Harry over as he did so, and the lad made sure his companion was killed.

How relieved he was when he heard him give a little laugh!

"By George, that was a narrow escape, and no mistake!" he exclaimed.

"Are you hurt?" inquired Harry, anxiously.

"No, thank heaven! It was a miracle, though, I was not crushed. I felt it going, and gave a jump with all my might. Luckily the stone slipped by me, and I got to the ground before I did. We must find some other way of getting them out, that's certain."

"What a pity we haven't got our lassoes!" said Harry in a tone of regret.

"Yes; but as we haven't got 'em, we must set to work for something that will do as well. Now I think I can see one way out of our difficulty. We carry ropes, you know, on our backs."

"On our backs!" repeated Harry, rather mystified.

"Yes; haven't we got our shirts?" inquired Raymond, quietly.

"I see," said Harry, excitedly—"you are going to tear them up."

"That's t," returned the captain.

In an instant their hunting dresses were off, and they had stripped themselves of their flannel shirts which they wore next their skins.

"And there are our belts too," said Harry. "Suppose we try them first, before we ruin our flannels?"

"Good!" returned his companion.

The belts were buckled to each other, and the two together were about six feet long. This, at all events, would enable them to get down at least two feet deeper.

"I've got another idea," said Raymond. "Why shouldn't we make use of this inclined plane? If we scrape this hard earth smooth, you will be able to drag up the stones, much easier than if you pulled them up by sheer strength."

"That's a capital thought!" exclaimed Harry, in a delighted tone. "Let's make haste and do it."

Out came their knives, and scrape, scrape they went against the earth.

It was very hard, for some kind of cement had been used to fasten the stones in, and a good deal of this had been left behind.

It took them quite half an hour to make the ground smooth, and they worked until the perspiration poured down their bodies.

With all their labor they had only been able to clear away some three feet at the top, but this they hoped would be sufficient.

"Let us rest awhile," said Raymond, when they got their preparations for lifting the stone completed.

Half exhausted, they sat down and prepared themselves for the severe labor that was to come.

"We cannot work more than an hour, as it will then be noon, and I daresay some of our jailers will visit us," observed Raymond.

"Why, how do you know the time?" inquired Harry, astonished.

"Easy enough," replied Raymond. "When we first began to work that sunbeam touched the side of the hole about a foot down. It now reaches down to the bottom, and soon the edge will cut it off altogether, and it will fall on the pavement immediately beneath the crack in the roof through which it finds its way."

"So it will," said Harry, who saw at once what Raymond meant. "And when it falls down in an upright line it will be noon. Why, we can tell the time as well as if we were in the open air."

"Well, I should think it wants quite an hour of noon, so we may work on for that time, at least."

When they had rested sufficiently they tried the inclined plane.

Raymond tied the belts round the stone which had so narrowly escaped crushing him, and lifted it on the plane.

Harry caught hold of the other end of the belt, and they found, between them, they could raise the stone with far less labor than before.

Three or four more stones were easily got up, and then Raymond came to a large one which had got wedged in so tightly that with all his efforts he could not succeed in dislodging it.

It did not, however, quite fit the sides of the staircase, and there was an opening through which he could put his hand and arm. To his surprise, let him thrust his arm as far as he could, he found no bottom.

"We've come to something at last," he called out—"or rather to nothing."

"Do you hear any water running?" said Harry.

"Yes, there's no doubt about that. I've heard it for some time. And I'm going to sound this hole and see how far it goes down," he replied, taking the two belts and dropping one end through the hole. It went down easy enough and at last stopped. There was about six inches left in his hand.

"About five feet deep," he called out, commencing to draw up the belt. He put his hand on the end which had been through the opening, and found it was quite wet for about four inches. What it meant he could not tell, but the removal of the stone would solve the mystery.

"There's only one way to get it out," he thought to himself, "and that is to cut all round it."

It was rather a difficult task, because in removing the stone he took away that on which he was standing.

He would therefore be obliged to cut for himself a couple of holes in the earth on each side of the stone so as to render himself quite independent of the latter.

This he at once began to do, and succeeded after a little toil; for the earth seemed to be a compound of brick, rubbish and soil, and did not give way very easily.

All at once Harry called out:

"Hist! I think I can hear some one outside!"

Instantly Raymond scrambled up the sloping side of the pit, and, with Harry's assistance, stepped out.

They both huddled on their clothes and hastened back to the other end of the apartment.

They had just time to lay themselves down, when the stone was rolled away, and the attendant entered.

Raymond was a little uneasy lest he should notice their disordered dress and dirty, begrimed appearance.

But they were some distance from the door, and in the room it was scarcely possible to see distinctly.

At any rate, the Indian did not show that he saw anything unusual. He put down the food he brought as usual, and retired, much to the relief of the prisoners.

The meal was very acceptable, and refreshed them considerably; and when they had finished, Raymond

descended the hole, and once more commenced his labors.

It was very hard work, for he had to bend his body almost double to get at the stone, and he could not labor for more than two or three minutes without resting.

But to his great joy he found he made good progress, and in half-an-hour's time had cut a hole of considerable size on one side.

Yielding to Harry's entreaties to allow him to share the work, he got out, and the lad took his place.

As he did not take up so much room as his companion, he could work easier and longer without resting.

He commenced cutting on the opposite side to that begun by Raymond, and had not been engaged more than five minutes before he felt the stone slipping downwards.

He called out to Raymond, but before the latter could reply, the stone fell down with a crash, leaving a dark opening sufficiently large for two men of ordinary size to pass through.

Luckily Harry kept his feet firmly planted in the holes which had been made for them, and he did not suffer the least injury.

"How deep has it fallen?" called out Raymond, anxiously.

"Not very far, I should think," returned Harry. "I felt some drops of water splash in my face, so it can't be more than a few feet."

"Try with the belt," said Raymond.

Harry did so, and found that the bottom was apparently solid, and not more than five feet; so he determined to explore the unknown region for himself.

"Here goes!" he called out; and taking one foot out of its resting place, and half holding by his hands to the rugged side of the hole, he lowered himself gradually into the pit.

He found himself standing on the top of the stone which had preceded him.

"Is there firm footing?" called out Raymond from above.

"Firm as a rock," answered Harry.

"Then wait for me," rejoined the captain, as he began to lower himself down.

In order to allow room for his companion, Harry stepped off the stone on to the ground, and found that the water was about two or three inches in depth, flowing over the surface.

He could scarcely stand upright, for the passage was not more than five feet high, and he shouted to Raymond to be cautious, fearing he might strike his head; for the darkness was such as he had never before seen, not even in the blackest night.

The next moment Raymond was standing by his side; and fastening the belts which had done them such good service round their waists, they prepared to enter on their unknown journey.

They found themselves in a narrow passage which extended on each side of them.

To the right it seemed to slope downwards—as in deed the flowing of the water in that direction sufficiently proved; and after a little hesitation, they determined to follow this downward path wherever it might lead.

With heads bowed and arms extended, they began feeling their way through the narrow passage.

It was not a nice journey, for they had to walk in the water all the way, and every now and then they would find themselves in a pool ten or twelve inches deep; and the water penetrated their leather gaiters, much to their discomfort.

Occasionally they would come to a place where the ground seemed to stop, and the water poured over the edge like a miniature cascade.

These cascades, however, were rarely more than a foot high, and there was no difficulty in jumping down; the only danger was in coming upon them unawares, and having an ugly tumble.

However, Raymond, who led the way, was very careful, and no accident occurred.

"We must be at least forty or fifty feet below the level of the temple," said he, after they had been walking about ten minutes.

"Ay," returned Harry. "I wonder where all this water comes from?" he said, after a pause.

"Most likely from a spring. It may have been running for hundreds of years, and perhaps its natural channel has been enlarged for some mysterious purpose or other. Certainly there must have been some reason for building that staircase," returned Raymond.

On, on they went, following the passage through all its windings.

Occasionally the roof was so low they had almost to crawl on all fours; at other times it rose, allowing them to walk upright; but it never exceeded at any place two feet in width, and some times was much narrower.

They must have been walking at least twenty minutes when the passage suddenly became much wider.

They were no longer obliged to walk in the channel made by the water, and though the ground was very rough, it was tolerably dry.

All at once they were brought to a stand-still by a solid wall of rock, which seemed to rise up perpendicularly before them.

"What can be the meaning of this?" exclaimed Harry. "Have we got to our journey's end?"

"We must find the stream, and follow that," replied the captain.

There was no difficulty in doing this, for the bubbling and splashing was quite a sufficient guide.

They discovered it took a sharp bend almost at right angles to its former path, and on following it they found it took them down a passage, at the end of which was a peculiar glare, like the reflection of a large fire.

"Whatever can this be?" asked Harry, almost in a whisper.

"I cannot say," returned Raymond in the same low tone. "We must be very careful."

Slowly and cautiously they approached the light, which they could see proceeded from a reflection thrown by the shining surface of a huge piece of rock. When they had reached it within a few feet, the passage seemed to end suddenly, and they found themselves in a large cave which appeared to them, coming as they did out of such utter darkness, one blaze of light.

Filled with awe, and scarcely daring to speak a word, they advanced a few yards into the cavern, and there beheld a sight which they never forgot to their dying day.

The cavern they were in, large as it appeared, was but a hole compared to the immense space in front of them.

The roof was at least a hundred feet high, while as for its width and breadth, they could not measure either, for the opposite sides could not be seen.

At their feet rolled the waters of a lake, which the stream they had followed ran down to meet; and in the center of the lake was a shining island of yellow metal, so bright and so dazzling that they could scarcely gaze upon it; while on the surface was a dark, square object which looked blacker from the contrast with the brilliancy all around.

Speechless with astonishment, the two gazed at each other in wonderment, and the yellow hue which the fierce glow of the fire sent over their faces seemed to transform and distort their features.

Raymond was the first to break the silence.

"Harry, my lad," he faltered, "our journey's at an end. The golden island lies before us."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAKE IN THE CAVERN.

It was indeed as Raymond had said.

There lay the Golden Island, the object of their search, and to gain which they had undergone so many trials and privations.

Of what use was it to them now that their days were drawing to an end?

A good fleet horse and a straight road would have been of far more value.

"Well, captain," said Harry, "we need not trouble ourselves any more about gold. What we have to think of now is how to make our escape."

"Yes, you are right," returned Raymond, not without a pang, for, having accomplished so much, he did not like giving up at the last moment.

Although he was obliged to own that his golden dream had vanished, he would still have made an attempt to turn it into a reality, even though it cost him his life.

But how was it possible, supposing he did succeed in taking some of the gold, to remove it away?

It was madness to think of it.

They stood gazing at the glittering sight for some time, and watched the flame surrounding the altar—for such the square object on the top of the island was—flickering and casting strange, grotesque shadows on the surface of the dark waters.

"I wonder at what time of the day the priests come to attend the fire?" said Harry at last.

"Ah, we must ask our little friend when she comes to-night," replied Raymond, thoughtfully.

He walked to the edge of the water, and watched the wavelets as they came rolling up, one after the other.

The surface of the water was very smooth, but there was a little ripple which somewhat puzzled him.

Could there be an outlet anywhere?

The thought gave him some hope; but he scarcely dared to open his mind to Harry for fear he should be afterwards disappointed.

There were a few twigs lying at his feet, and he stooped down and picked up two or three and examined them.

They were moist and soddened, and had evidently been thrown up by the water very recently.

He threw one of them from him carelessly, and watched it intently as it floated slowly away.

"What are you looking at, captain?" asked Harry, who was a little mystified at Raymond's behavior.

The captain appeared not to hear him, but kept watching his bit of wood dancing on the water.

Harry approached the edge of the lake, and stood by Raymond's side.

His companion was either buried in thought, or was amusing himself very strangely, for he threw a second piece of wood into the water, and gazed at it as intently as he had at the first.

He seemed to watch the little crafts as eagerly as any schoolboy might have done, and when he saw them both disappear in the gloom, he muttered something to himself which Harry could not hear.

"Whatever ails the captain?" thought Harry.

For an instant the thought flashed through his mind, that the events of the last few days had turned his companion's brain; but directly afterwards, he dismissed the idea when he looked at Raymond's face.

It was a little sterner, but one glance at his eye was sufficient to show his mind was as clear as ever.

Apparently satisfied, Raymond turned to Harry, and with his accustomed cheerful voice, said:

"Well, we've got so far; but it seems to me we can do no more."

"Why, don't you think this lake has an opening anywhere?" inquired the lad, anxiously.

"I can't tell," returned the captain, thoughtfully—"at least, not now. For the present, we had better return to the temple. It's getting very near the time when our jailers visit us, and it would never do for them to find us gone. If we do mean to escape, we must have as long a start as possible."

Harry could not help thinking Raymond was right, so half reluctantly he turned his back upon the lake

and the Golden Island, and groped his way to the back of the cave.

Raymond followed close behind and soon they were crawling through the dark and winding passage.

Coming from so bright a light, the darkness seemed more intense than ever, and as they had to go up hill, they found the return journey far more laborious than was their journey to the lake.

They could not have been less than three-quarters of an hour in getting to the ruined staircase, and by the time they had reached the floor of the apartment whence they started they were thoroughly worn out. To their satisfaction they found the chamber exactly as they had left it.

The stone was still against the door; and they knew by this no one had paid a visit to the room.

"Good luck so far," exclaimed Raymond, as he threw his tired frame on the ground. "Our friends the priests would be rather surprised to find we had made ourselves acquainted with their great secret place before the time, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, that they would," returned Harry. "But tell me," he continued, earnestly, "what do you really think of our day's work? Is it any good, or have we wasted the time?"

"I think," said the captain, slowly, "that we shan't need to escape through the roof, and that your plan is better than mine."

"Then there is a way of escaping by the lake?" exclaimed Harry, joyfully.

"Well, I didn't quite say that," rejoined Raymond; "but I'm pretty certain that if we are to get away it will be across those dark waters."

"Now, what were you thinking about, captain," said Harry, laying his hand on his companion's shoulder, "when we were standing by the edge of the water? I know it was something important, because you did not hear me when I spoke."

"I was watching those pieces of wood float away," said the captain, gravely.

"Yes, I know you were; but you were thinking of something else besides. I'm certain of it," returned the lad, in a confident tone.

"Well, it was just this—that the pieces of wood gave me a clue to a means of escape. I did not intend to say anything to you until I was pretty sure, for fear I should be wrong, and we've had bitter disappointments enough."

"That's true. But, captain," he continued, half reproachfully, "why were you afraid to trust me? I can bear to hear bad news," he added, thinking of the trial he had lately passed through, and the one which was to come.

"You're right, Harry," said Raymond, "and I was wrong. I never doubted your courage; it was only to spare you some unnecessary pain."

"Never mind about that," returned the lad. "If your plan fails, you will not find me blaming you."

"Then you shall hear what I have been thinking about," said Raymond. "There's one thing I've settled in my own mind, and that is, I'm certain that lake has got an outlet somewhere. There's a decided current in one direction, and my idea is that its waters find their way somehow or other to the River Frio."

"Why, the river must be quite a mile away!" said Harry.

"Yes, I know that; but why should not a branch be a mile long?" returned Raymond. "If I could only know where the outlet of the cave is, I should be certain, because the river, we know, lies to the south."

"And how are you going to find that out?" asked the lad.

"Why, our little Mexican friend will be able to tell us that, won't she?" rejoined Raymond.

"Ay, so she will," said Harry.

Just then their usual evening meal was brought, the stone being rolled back as before.

After they had finished their supper they waited patiently for the Queen of the Guatosos.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH PHIL REAPPEARS.

ONCE more we are on Lake Nicaragua, and are on board an unwieldy, awkward bongo.

It has evidently been hardly dealt with, for its mast has gone, one of the seats on which the rowers sat has been smashed in, and the *alotla*, or awning of bull's-hide at the stern, has vanished.

In the boat there are several men, three of whom are unmistakably English.

These are sitting at one end, while the others, who are Indians, are rowing.

There is little need to guess who these three men are.

They can be no other than Phil and the two sailors. The storm found the rowers of their bongo as little prepared as those who manned the bongo in which Raymond and Harry were.

Not that Phil or his two companions did not expect the hurricane, for they had had too much experience at sea to be deceived, but their hands and feet were still bound, and they could do nothing.

In vain they had pointed as well as they could to the sail which was being blown first to one side and then to the other before the wind.

The Indians did not understand them, and took no notice of their gestures.

The storm came and caught the sail as it had done that of the other bongo.

In an instant the vessel had heeled over, throwing half a dozen of the Indians headlong into the water.

With a loud crack the mast snapped and the sail was rent in twain.

This had the effect of righting the bongo, but it was half-filled with water, and the furious sea threatened every moment to swamp it completely.

The Indians did all they could to bail out the water, and at last succeeded; but it took some time, for they were by their losses, now reduced to ten men.

The thongs which bound the prisoners were too tough to be easily loosened, and had the bongo gone down the three men must have been drowned; for tired as they were, they were not able to help themselves in the least.

Their first thought was of course about the other bongo, but it was nowhere to be seen, and they imagined it to have been lost, while Harry and Raymond had, as we know, the same thoughts about them.

"Poor fellow!" said Phil. "There's an end to all his fine dreams, and mine too, for the matter of that."

"What d'ye make of that?" suddenly said one of the

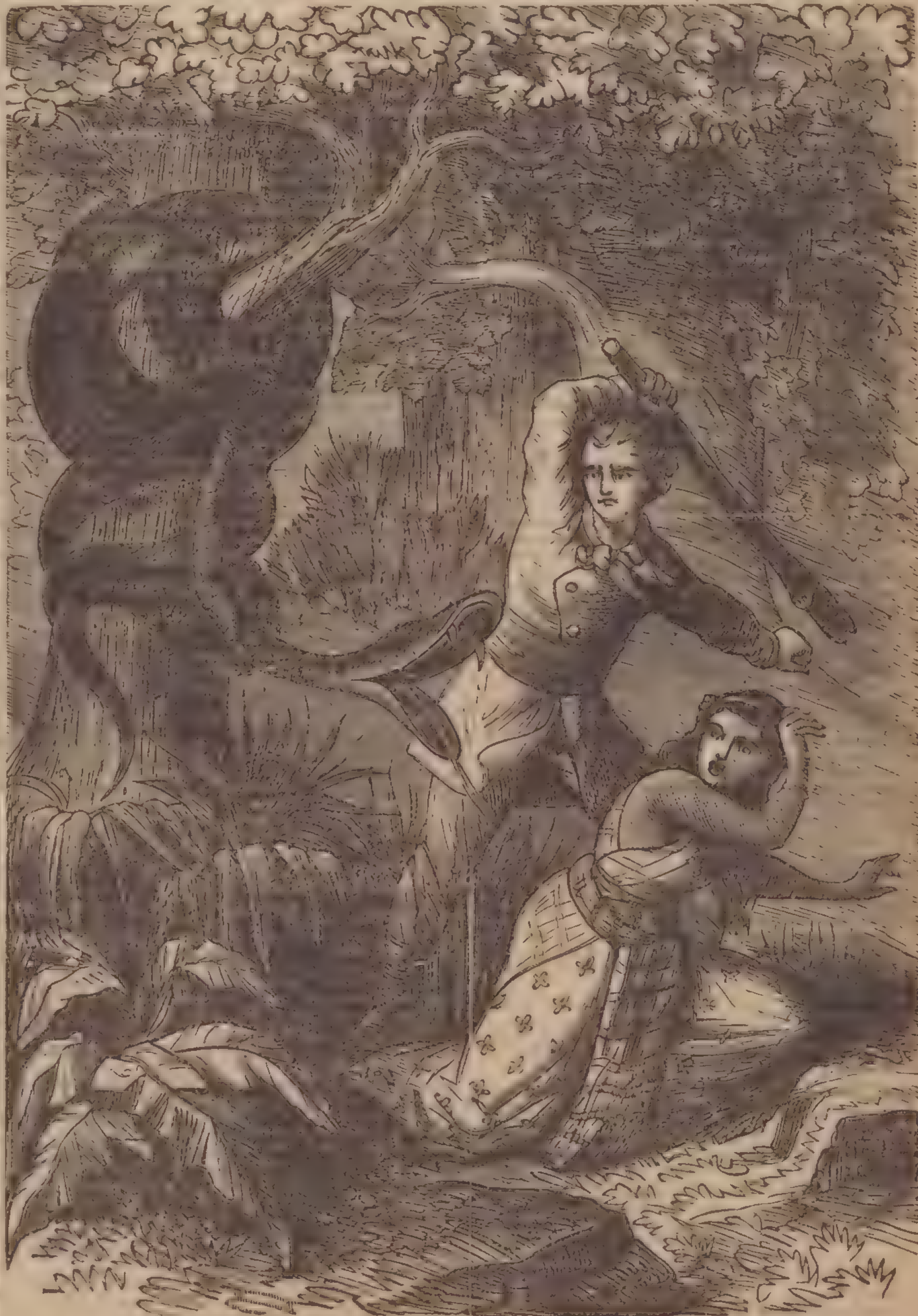
other bongo, and they concluded it had outstripped them.

Meanwhile the ten rowers in their own boat settled down to their oars, and the bongo once more went steadily on its way.

In due time it reached the River Frio, and in fact, followed exactly the course which I have before described.

Phil saw from the way in which the men rowed directly for the river that they were only following out a settled plan, and he persuaded himself that the other bongo had already preceded them.

Several times during the journey the prisoners had consulted together as to their chance of escaping; but their captors were so numerous, and they were bound so securely, that they could see no way out of the difficulty.



Seizing the club he swung it around and brought it down with terrific force on the head of the reptile.

sailors, nodding his head to the southeast; for he could not, of course, point with his hand.

The other two started up as well as they were able, and looked intently in the direction indicated.

"That's the other bongo, safe enough," said Phil. "Her sail's gone, d'ye see, but there's the top of her tall mast."

Yes; Phil was right. There was no doubt he saw the mast of the bongo.

As for the vessel itself, it could scarcely be seen, and of course it was impossible to tell whether those on board were safe or not.

But at all events it was going at a much greater rate than their own, and Phil argued from this that the rowers in the other bongo were more numerous.

On the whole the three men were full of hope, and agreed among themselves that Harry and Raymond were safe.

In a few minutes they could not see anything of the

But now the Indians were reduced in strength, one obstacle was at all events partly removed.

It was in the afternoon of the second day after they entered the river that Jack, nudging Phil, said in a whisper:

"I say, messmate, if we'd got our hands free, d'ye think we could manage them chaps?"

"Ay, only give me the chance, that's all," replied Phil, in his deep voice.

"Then I'm blessed if we don't have a try. See here! Don't let the niggers see you're looking though," he added.

Phil nodded, as much as to say "Trust me," and cautiously gave a glance at Jack's right arm.

To all appearance the thong which tied it to his body was as perfect as ever, but on Jack moving his arm slightly, Phil saw that the leather had been gnawed three-parts through.

"I've been at work this last night," said Jack, tri

triumphantly; "and ten minutes more'll finish it. This arm's the same," he added, nodding towards his left arm.

Phil was immensely taken with Jack's idea.

"Look here," said he. "As soon as it's dark we'll set to work and get these things off, and if all's well, we'll have a dash at the beggars to-night."

"Shall we have time, d'ye think?" returned Jack, doubtfully. "It's a tough job to know this hard bull's hide, I can tell you."

"I've got summat as'll do it in a brace o' shakes," returned Phil, "if I could only get at it. There's a little knife in a pocket inside my hunting-dress—the only difficulty is how to drag it out."

"Praps I can get it when my hands are free, and that won't belong," said Jack.

"That's just what I thought," returned Phil.

It wanted quite two hours of sunset, and the three men waited impatiently for night. If Phil's knife could only be reached, a few minutes would set them at liberty. Evening approached at last, and the glaring sun went down behind the black forest.

His rays were seen for some few minutes between the upper part of the foliage of the trees which lined either side of the river, and then disappeared.

When the night had fairly set in, Jack began to bite through the small piece of leather which still kept his arms bound.

He had, however, to move his seat; for to their annoyance the scene was so illuminated by fire flies that he must have been seen by the Indians had he remained where he was.

"What's to be done?" said he to Phil. "How on earth am I to get at your knife without being seen?"

"Can you get your hands free?" said Phil in reply.

"In five minutes' time I shall be ready," returned the other.

"Then leave the rest to me," said Phil.

In a little more than five minutes Phil whispered "All right."

"Then," said Phil, "I'm going to take a nap. I shall lie down with my face towards you, and you and Peter had better follow my example. D'ye understand?"

Jack did understand, for he saw in an instant what Phil's plan was, and he lay down by the side of his companion, keeping his arms as if they were still tied, to avoid the suspicions of the Indians.

Phil's face was turned towards the stern of the *bongo*, consequently the Indians were at his back, and Jack found little difficulty in opening his hunting-dress and taking from it a little penknife.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Phil, under his breath; for he knew the Indians believed they had gone to sleep, and he did not want to unbind them.

Quickly the knife was passed from one to the other, and in a few minutes the things which bound their arms and legs were cut, and they were once more free!

"Ah," whispered Phil, drawing a deep breath. "Now I'm ready for anything. It takes all the pluck out of one to be tied hand and foot and unable to move."

All this time the rowers in the *bongo* had kept steadily to their work.

They seemed to be making-up for the delay caused by the shortness of their crew, and they rowed in the night as well as day.

Phil and his two friends were rather puzzled what to do now got they had got their liberty; but they knew well that whatever they decided upon must be carried out that night for in the morning the absence of their bonds would be sure to be discovered.

There were six men now rowing, the other four sleeping at the bottom of the *bongo*.

The time was drawing very near when the rowers would be changed, and Phil thought it would be better to wait until then, as there would be but four men awake instead of six as at present.

This was agreed to, and they waited patiently until the rowers were changed.

The time came at last, and after the six who had been rowing were allowed to get fairly asleep, Phil gave the signal for the attack.

Had it not been for the fire-flies they would have crept cautiously forward and made the attack when they got close to the rowers, so as to have given them as little time as possible to prepare themselves.

Unfortunately, they could not do this owing to the light, and when Phil said "Now," he rose and threw himself violently upon the two nearest men.

With a blow right and left, he knocked both clean out of the *bongo*, while Jack and Peter attacked the other two rowers, and met with similar success.

Of course all this could not be done without making a good deal of noise, and the sleeping men were soon aroused.

But Phil and the sailors did not give them much time to think, for before they could comprehend what was the matter, two were hauled over the side of the *bongo* into the dark waters.

The four Indians who were left were stout, well-built fellows—in fact, the best men in the crew; and as they had had more time to gather themselves together, the three Englishmen had still their work to do.

Two of the Indians had thrown themselves upon Phil, and clung like leeches to him, striving to overpower him by main force.

Jack and Peter had each a skillful antagonist opposed to him, and for a moment the victory hung balanced.

Had it been only the four men, there would not have been much doubt as to which way the fight would terminate; but there was the danger that some of the Indians, who had been thrown into the water, would crawl back into the *bongo*, and come to the assistance of their companions.

It was therefore simply a question of time, and could the Englishmen succeed in sending their antagonists into the water, they could easily keep them at bay.

But the fight was destined to end in a most unexpected manner.

The struggle and the trampling of feet had caused the *bongo* to sway from side to side, and now that the whole weight was gathered at the bows—for it was at this end where the Indians had been sleeping—this portion was much deeper in the water than the stern; and while the combat was going on, the *bongo* had drifted out of the center of the stream, and had approached the bank.

By some means or other the whole of the combatants suddenly found themselves at the stern of the boat, which now, of course, became the lowest end.

It sunk in the water until the surface of the latter was within eight or nine inches of the edge of the *bongo*, when suddenly a loud crack, which seemed to come from beneath their feet, startled both parties.

The next instant they could feel the water oozing up from the bottom of the *bongo*, and in a few seconds their feet were covered.

There was not much difficulty in guessing what had happened.

The *bongo* had struck upon the sharp point of a splintered tree, buried in the bed of the river, and was fast filling with water.

The struggling of the men had sent her stern down with a jerk, and the brittle cedar of which the *bongo* was composed had been split by the jagged tree almost as effectually as if struck by an axe.

In less than half a minute the antagonists were fighting, or rather wrestling, for very few blows passed—in a depth of water which reached above their knees.

The point of the tree had forced itself right through the floor, and the *bongo* was, as it were, impaled at one end.

It was thus prevented from sinking at the stern, but the bows were already under water.

It was impossible for the fight to continue long, under the circumstances.

With superhuman strength Phil clutched the throat of one of his antagonists with his right hand, and forced him back until his head was under water.

The man's hold relaxed, and he fell over the side of the *bongo*, which at the same moment heeled over, throwing the whole of the combatants into the river.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PHIL TO THE RESCUE.

As if by instinct, each one no longer thought of his foe, but sought to save his own life.

Phil and the two sailors were all excellent swimmers, and directly they found their antagonists let go their hold, they at once made for the bank.

There did not seem to be so much light as before, but they could easily see each other, and Phil, struck with a sudden idea, called out:

"Swim a few yards down the river. Don't land here."

He thought that if the Indians saw them get safely to shore they would follow them, but if they got out of sight before they landed, their enemies would be uncertain as to their fate.

Swiftly they darted through the black waters, and by keeping as near as they could in the middle of the stream, they were not so easily seen as they would have been had they swam near the banks, illuminated, as the latter were, by thousands of lantern beetles.

For five or six minutes not a word was spoken, although it was doubtful whether they would have been heard; for on all sides came the dismal cries of the *congo*, and the unearthly noise seemed to swallow up every other sound.

At last, drawing near to Jack, Phil said:

"I don't believe the beggars are following us, after all. We'd better get ashore, d'ye see? There's a sight too many alligators in this river to suit me."

"Ay, ay," replied the others.

"Then here goes," said Phil, making for the bank on his left hand.

Jack and Peter followed, and a few vigorous strokes brought them to the side.

The bank was at least six feet high, and covered with a tangle of creeping plants.

They did not find much difficulty in scrambling up, although their hands and faces were scratched in all directions by the sharp thorns.

On reaching the top they saw that a dense jungle, interspersed with trees of vast size, effectually barred their way into the interior; and as they were without hatchets it would be but a waste of time to try and force a passage.

For three hours they walked in Indian file along the bank of the river; but as far as they went the wall of jungle still kept pace with them.

It seemed, indeed, to be endless, and Phil began to be very uncomfortable.

Still they walked on, buoying up their hearts with hope.

The sun rose, and its beams, forcing their way through the dense foliage, transformed the scene into a Paradise.

But the weary travelers had no eyes for beauty just then.

The gorgeous mass of flowers which bordered the jungle they would gladly have exchanged for the dry sand of the desert and a good steed.

But it was useless to indulge in vain wishes, and on, on they went, for every moment might bring with it some risk of discovery.

By-and-by they came to a point where the path seemed to end, and the only way to proceed was by climbing down the bank.

The river was very shallow at this part, and the bank, after an almost perpendicular descent, gradually sloped to the water's edge.

The three men lowered themselves down to the sand

at the foot of the bank, and as they did so, they saw some one had been there before them.

The sand was quite dry, and the water had been gradually receding; for the dry season was far advanced.

On the sands were footprints distinctly printed, and Phil no sooner noticed them than he at once saw the importance of the discovery, for it was more than likely they would serve him as a guide.

He stooped down, and had no sooner done so than he started back in amazement, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What's amiss?" cried his companions, seeing his look of astonishment.

"Thank heaven!" was Phil's only reply, as he bent over the footprints and examined them anew.

"Why, what's in the wind now?" asked Jack.

"Look here," said Phil, pointing to two of the footmarks.

The sailors obeyed, and saw that the prints were different to all the rest.

The two pointed out by Phil were evidently made by shoes, while the others were the impression of naked feet.

The marks made by the shoes were not quite the same size, and showed that they belonged to different persons.

"Now, d'ye see what we've found?" said Phil, triumphantly. "Captain Raymond and Harry have been here and no mistake, and if they're alive in this world we'll find them."

They easily traced the footmarks round the point, and then up again on to the bank.

Here they became indistinct; but to Phil's experienced eye, there were sufficient traces to enable him to note them from time to time, especially as the ground was a little marshy.

About a quarter of a mile from the spot where the footprints were first discovered, they suddenly disappeared.

Phil looked long and anxiously, but could not find a single sign.

"I can't quite make this out," said he. "They haven't been by here—I'll stake my life upon it; and yet where can they have gone?"

"How was it we didn't see them afore we came to the sand?" asked Jack.

"Well, I expect they landed from the *bongo* at that point. I'm pretty sure they did from the marks I noticed. But that doesn't matter. What bothers me is where they have gone to."

After thinking awhile, Phil determined to retrace his steps to the place where he last saw the footprints. He did so, and after walking about a hundred yards, suddenly stopped.

"See," said he, "they have turned just here! The marks bear round towards the forest."

It was so; but for what purpose? Could it be possible a way had been forced through the dense jungle?

Phil could hardly believe it, but there was no other solution of the difficulty, and he examined the undergrowth with great care.

To all appearance it was a thick network of tropical plants, and nothing seemed less likely than the existence of a path.

On carefully looking at the part opposite the place where the footprints ended, Phil saw that some of the twigs had been broken, certainly within a day or two.

This gave him hope, and on pushing the bushes on one side, he found the distinct mark of a foot about a yard within the jungle.

"They've come through here," he muttered to himself; and bidding the others follow, he began to force his way between the thick brushwood.

To his surprise he found it much easier than he imagined, and soon something like a path began to be seen.

This of course made their traveling much easier, but it also compelled them to be very cautious, for they might run a risk of being discovered.

"I tell ye what," said Phil, "our best plan is to lay by till night. It 'ud never do to spoil all by being in a hurry."

He had halted opposite a large cocoa palm, and looking up he saw its wide-spreading, graceful branches thickly covered with leaves.

The foliage, indeed, was so dense that a dozen men might have hidden in it with safety.

Its tapering trunk shot up to a vast height, but it was easy enough to climb, on account of its peculiarly rough surface, which gave so many foot-holds.

"That tree's just the very thing!" exclaimed Phil, when he saw it.

"Aye, and we shall have plenty to eat, too," added Jack, eyeing the cocoanuts peeping between the broad leaves.

So it was settled, and hand over hand went the three men to whom climbing a tree was as natural as it was to a squirrel.

Here, some forty or fifty feet from the ground they made themselves at home, and patiently waited for the evening.

Though at a great height, they were by no means at the top of the tree, and after waiting for an hour, Jack suggested they should go aloft, and have a look-out.

Phil agreed, and in a few minutes' time they were as high as they could go.

Though trees without number towered above them in majestic beauty, yet their position enabled them to see a good distance across the forest, and directly Phil cast his eyes around he saw they had made a great discovery.

About a mile off he could see a large building upon which the sun shone with dazzling brilliancy.

He could not quite make out its form on account of the trees which came in his way; but it seemed to be surrounded with a colonnade.

At one end a square tower was plainly visible, while the roof was perfectly flat.

While pondering as to the meaning of this building, the sound of music was faintly heard.

It was as if a thousand voices were singing in chorus, and the effect, as the wind at intervals drew nearer and nearer, was very grand.

The men looked at each other and marveled what it was they heard; but in the midst of their wonder, they saw a long procession make its way on to the roof of the building.

All three had good eyes, and were accustomed to see objects afar off, and they could easily distinguish two figures who were differently dressed, and stood apart from the rest.

Clutching Jack's arm with a grasp of iron, Phil, exclaimed, in a voice full of emotion, and which he tried to suppress as well as he could:

"D'ye see them? It's Master George and Harry. May heaven have mercy on their souls!"

And, indeed, as we know, they had need of a prayer; for as Phil uttered his fervent wish the priest in the scarlet robe had raised his knife.

What Phil's anguish was when he saw this can hardly be imagined.

He first prayed, and then swore a little; he was going to descend the tree and fly to their rescue; and then, recollecting how useless it would have been; thought he would throw himself down—in fact, for a few moments his brain was turned.

But in the midst of his excitement, he never took his eyes off the temple; and when he saw the two led safely away, his joy knew no bounds.

In spite of the cautions of his companions, he gave vent to a loud hurrah, but after he had relieved his feelings he came back to his former self.

"We'll cut our way to them somehow, even if it's only to die!" he exclaimed.

And it did not need a second look at his face to know that he meant what he said.

When evening came they prepared to descend; and having carefully marked the bearings of the building, they once more stood within the forest and set off on their journey of rescue.

It wanted but half an hour of sunset when they started, and darkness had come fully on when they reached the high wall which, as you will remember, surrounded the city of the Guatosos.

The moon, however, shone with great brilliancy, and enabled them to climb the wall, which, high as it was, presented little difficulty to the active sailors.

CHAPTER XXX.

PHIL AND THE SAILORS IN THE HIDDEN CITY.

WHEN they reached the top they found it was of immense thickness.

It was wide enough for two men to walk abreast and they debated for some time whether they had better lower themselves at once to the ground, or proceed for a little distance in order to ascertain the kind of place they were in.

"It's a curious kind of building," said Jack, trying to peer through the semi-darkness which surrounded them. "It looks to me as if there was another wall in front of us."

"Ay, so it does," replied Phil, who could plainly see something black looming before him.

"Can we jump it, d'ye think?" said Peter.

"No, thank ye," returned Phil. "It's at least eight or nine feet distant; besides, it's too dark. No, we'll let ourselves down, and creep along under the wall."

The wall on which they were standing was covered with mosses and creeping plants.

It was built of immense blocks of clay, baked hard in the sun, but was decayed in various parts.

It was easy enough therefore to descend, and soon the three were standing on the solid earth.

"What about the other wall," asked Jack, in a whisper.

"Scale it, of course," said Phil, preparing to do so.

One after the other climbed to the top of the second wall, and let themselves down on the other side.

"Why, how much more of this kind of thing shall we have?" exclaimed Jack, as they found themselves in a narrow passage corresponding to the one on the other side.

"Never mind. As many as there are, we must climb them," returned Phil.

The third wall was soon disposed of, and when they had got safely over, they found they had conquered all their difficulties as far as walls were concerned.

It was evidently an open space in which they were, but how far it extended they could not tell, for very few moonbeams found their way through the dense foliage.

"We had better keep close," whispered Phil. "We are in the city for a certainty, and we may meet some awkward customers."

They were very much puzzled what to do, for although they had made up their minds, Raymond and Harry were concealed somewhere in the city, they had yet to find them.

To move about in daylight was to expose them to danger of capture, and yet how was it possible to search without the assistance of light?

"This is a mighty queer place we're in now," said Jack, who had just stumbled over a huge stone which in the darkness he had not seen. "People don't often take a stroll here in the night, I'll be bound."

"Well, our best plan," said Phil, who had been turning over the matter in his mind, "is to bide our time, d'ye see? If we get as near as we can to the huts—for I expect we shall come to some soon—and then hide ourselves, and keep a sharp lookout, something p'raps 'll turn up as 'll help us a bit."

The two men agreed; and this being settled, all three once more started forward.

They did not go many yards before they came to a spot where the trees had been cleared, and the bright moon, showed them plainly enough a few scattered houses in the distance.

"We've come rather too far," said Phil. "We must find a hiding-place a little way back."

He retraced his steps, and stopped opposite a huge locust tree growing near a fragment of decayed stonework.

"If that was hollow, now," said he, giving it a little tap, "that would be just the thing, wouldn't it?"

Singular enough, the tree, when he tapped it, sent forth a hollow sound, and he was tempted to strike the trunk once more. He did so, and again came a distinct ring.

"That's curious, ain't it?" he said to Jack. "If it wasn't such a big fellow, I should ha' thought the white ant had been at work."

The tree was about four feet in diameter, and though the destructive white ant sometimes selects trees of this size for its depredations, such occasions are very rare.

Still there was something so unmistakable in the sound that Phil took out his penknife—that knife to which they owed their liberty—and dug it into the tree.

To his amazement, the blade went readily through the bark, and buried itself apparently in the wood up to the handle.

"That's rum," said he, drawing out the knife. "I think I must see further into this."

He commenced cutting into the tree, but chose a place as near to the wall as possible. He found that the bark was scarcely half an inch thick, and that there was evidently a hollow behind it. Picking up a fragment of the wood, he held it in the moonlight, and exclaimed:

"I see how it is. The white ant has been here and taken up his quarters. I shouldn't wonder if there isn't a hole big enough to hold us three."

The white ant is the most destructive creature to all kinds of wood. Its method is generally to eat out the center of anything, and to leave the outer parts standing, so that one might often take a tree to be sound when in reality it was eaten away and good for nothing.

Phil recommenced cutting, and soon had a hole big enough to put his hand and arm in. He found he could just reach the opposite side with the tips of his fingers.

In ten minutes, by dint of cutting and stripping the bark, he had made it sufficiently large to put his head inside, and in twenty minutes more he exclaimed triumphantly:

"Now, then, my lads, we shall have a safe place, and no mistake."

All the fragments of the wood were gathered up and dropped inside; and some branches and leaves were collected to place on the top of the wall as near as possible to the hole, so as to hide it from view.

The three men then got inside the hollow, and found it was just large enough to hold them by dint of a little squeezing. Then they pulled the branches over the hole, and thus awaited the morning.

When dawn approached, Phil stepped cautiously out, and gave a glance round. The first thing which struck him was the white stone of a large building, which, elevated at a great height, peeped between the trees.

The whiteness of the stone, and its glitter, as the glancing rays of the sun lighted it up, immediately reminded him of the scene they had witnessed the day before from the top of the cocoa palm.

"If that isn't the building, I'm a Dutchman," he murmured, "and I'll wager they're inside it at this moment."

At that instant he caught sight of the tower, and he no longer doubted.

He hastened back to his companions, and told them his intelligence.

"Now, what had we better do?" said he.

It was really difficult to decide, but if they intended to do anything they would have to execute it at once, for the sun had risen quite half an hour.

"I vote we make a dash for it at once," said Jack.

"Ay, but we must be careful," returned Phil. "It'll never do to walk in the open; we must creep along in the underwood."

So it was agreed; and the three, leaving their hiding-place, went down on their hands and knees among the tall ferns and grasses.

They passed several huts in safety, and got within two hundred yards of the temple.

All at once, Phil, who was leading, started backwards, almost overthrowing Jack, who was next him, and uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"Look out, boys, there's a corral!" he whispered.

A corral! The most deadly snake of Central America! Jack instantly stopped, and looked over Paul's shoulder. The most beautiful snake he had ever seen was before him. It was of a blood-red color, and had bright yellow stripes round its body at intervals.

Half its length was concealed in the bushes, and its head was raised a few inches above the ground.

Its mouth was open, and its long-pointed tongue was darting rapidly about; while its bright eyes gleamed like points of light.

The corral though one of the most beautiful, is at the same time one of the most poisonous in the world.

A bite from its sharp fang, and death in the most horrible form is the certain result. Its poison seems to have the effect of thickening the blood, and the victim dies in great agony.

Phil knew his danger, and springing back, gave a bound into the path which went alongside the wood.

Directly he did so he knew he had fallen into a dan-

ger of another kind, for about a hundred yards ahead were a party of Indian soldiers.

The instant they saw him they darted forward, and he had scarcely time to call upon Jack and Peter before they were upon him.

There were at least twenty men in the party, and all were armed, some with long spears, and others with clubs. Unfortunately the three Englishmen could not retreat into the bush, for they knew death from the corral was a certainty, and to go forward was equally impossible.

"We must slip into them with our fists," muttered Phil between his teeth.

Shoulder to shoulder stood the three brave fellows, and thus awaited the attack of their enemies. The first three men who ventured within reach of their arms bit the dust, for the fists of the sailors fell like sledge hammers upon their faces.

But their places were easily filled up, and soon the two sailors were borne to the ground, overcome by sheer force of numbers.

They fought like heroes; but what could two unarmed men do against so many? The Indians were like madmen.

They yelled and shouted, whirled their clubs over their heads, and soon Phil saw that he was left alone, for his companions, if not dead, were at all events senseless and incapable of further assistance.

He had fought with the courage of a little bull-dog, and had vanquished three of his assailants.

A heavy stone, however, thrown by one of the Indians, struck him on the right temple, and he reeled against some of the ruined stone work.

At that moment an Indian darted forward with his spear uplifted, and with a horrid yell rushed upon the half-stunned man.

Phil saw the fellow coming as in a dream, but he seemed powerless to help himself.

The point of the spear was within a few inches of his breast, and he gave himself up for lost, when a woman—or rather a girl, for she was nothing more—rushed between him and his assailant, flinging out her arms wildly, said something in a commanding tone to the Indian.

To Phil's infinite amazement the man instantly lowered his spear, and looked hesitatingly from one to the other.

Again the girl cried out in a few words, and the Indian silently put up his weapon.

The girl appeared to be very angry at the latter's hesitation.

Her eyes gleamed and a dark frown was on her brow, but the next minute her expression changed, and, turning round to Phil, she said in a low, sweet voice, in Spanish:

"Be not afraid. Go quietly whither they will take you, and all will be well."

Phil stared, as well he might, at hearing the girl's words, and he was about to reply, when she said quickly:

"Hush! Do not speak, or I can do nothing."

In the dizzy confused state of his brain—caused partly by the blow he had received, and the sudden turn events had taken—Phil could hardly decide whether he was awake or asleep.

He was soon aroused, however, by the Indian laying his hand on his arm and motioning towards the white building.

Then five or six men came up and stood on either side, and Phil saw it would be wise to yield quietly, as the girl had said, and go wherever they took him.

"I'm alive," he thought, "and that is something. But how about Jack and Peter?"

In the hurry and excitement of the fight each man had scarce time to think of anybody save himself, and great was Phil's grief when he saw his two faithful companions lying stretched on the ground, still and silent.

From the wounds they had received, it was impossible for them to be alive; and Phil, hardened as he was to scenes of bloodshed, could not prevent a tear stealing down his weather-beaten face.

"Well," he said to himself, "it's no use crying over spilt milk. What's done is done, and there's an end of it; but this day's seen the last of two of the bravest fellows that ever stepped in shoe-leather."

With a sad heart he allowed himself to be led off; but as he did so, he received a ray of comfort from the Indian girl, who whispered one word, "Courage," in his ear as he passed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A HAPPY MEETING.

WHEN Harry and Raymond returned from their journey to the cave of the Golden Island, they awaited patiently the coming of the Indian girl.

The hours passed slowly by, but she came not, and at last, weary and heart-sick, they saw the first pale beams of the morning sun steal through the crevices of the roof.

"Harry, lad," said Raymond, "we need not watch any more. She won't come now, I'm certain."

"She won't play us false, will she, captain?" said the lad earnestly.

"No—that is if I am any judge of faces," returned the captain, in a doubtful tone. "The Mexicans are a treacherous set, and this girl may—but no; I won't say anything against her. She may have been prevented from coming—who can tell?"

Harry was glad to hear Raymond say this, for he had a firm belief in Lola's truth and honor.

He felt certain she would have come had she been able.

"Well, then," said he, aloud, "we may sleep now until to-night, mayn't we?"

His companion assented, and, thoroughly worn out with the previous day's toil and their long vigil of the

night, they had scarcely closed their eyes before they were sound asleep.

When they awoke they found the Indian had already visited them.

There was the usual supply of food by their side, and glad enough were they to see it.

"What do you think is the time?" said Harry, rubbing his eyes.

Raymond got up and looked at a bright ray which fell upon the pavement near him, and in which the notes were dancing merrily.

"At least three hours past noon, I should say?" said Raymond.

"Are you going to pay a visit to the Golden Island to-day?" went on the lad.

"Well, I've been thinking over our plans, and I've come to this: that there's an outlet from the cavern into the river, and that if we could only get a canoe we'd have a good chance of escaping."

"A canoe!" repeated Harry, wonderingly. "We might as well wish for the moon."

"I don't know that," replied the captain, thoughtfully; "it's very certain the priests who attend the fire must get across the water somehow or other, and I don't think it is very likely they would swim. No. Depend upon it there is a boat somewhere near if we could only find it."

"By George!" cried Harry, "I believe you're not far from the truth. I never thought of that. Only wait until Lola comes, and we shall know all about it."

The day wore on and evening approached.

The last meal of the prisoners was brought, and the door safely closed with the stone.

Soon darkness surrounded them; and they waited anxiously for the light shining between the pillars, announcing the welcome arrival of the young Mexican. But she came not.

Four weary hours passed, and no light appeared.

"I'm afraid we're deceived," said Raymond, sadly.

"No, no; I'm sure she'd come if she could," remarked Harry, with energy.

Raymond half smiled, but said nothing, for he did not like to cast down the hopes of the lad.

In his own mind, however, he was tolerably certain that if they were to escape it would have to be by their own efforts.

Suddenly, however, he was roused by a cry of delight from Harry, who rose to his feet and ran to meet the girl, who, with her light, was indeed advancing towards them.

As she approached she looked so beautiful that Harry involuntarily pulled off his hat, and paid her as much respect as if she had been a duchess.

"I knew you would come," said he in grateful tones. The girl smiled sadly, and placing her hand on her heart, said, half-proudly:

"Lola does not break her word. She would have come last night, but she was working for her friends."

"Her friends!" thought Harry. "Does she mean me and the captain, I wonder?"

But he said nothing, and walked silently by the side of the girl.

Raymond met them, and expressed his joy at seeing Lola again.

He was about to ask her some question about the Golden Island, when she interrupted him by saying she had some good news for them.

"Some news?" said Raymond. "Is it that we are free—are free?"

He hesitated, for he could not bring himself to believe that this could be true.

"Not so good as that, but nearly," replied the Mexican. "I have brought you an old friend."

Harry and Raymond were thoroughly mystified. What friend of theirs could Lola bring them? Of course, had not poor Phil been drowned, there might have been a chance of his finding his way, but they had little hopes of his being alive, and, if he were, how could he get through the city without being discovered?

"You are jesting with us," said Raymond.

Lola shook her head and said, "Come."

She turned and led the way towards the stone monument, in which was the secret door, and Raymond and Harry wonderingly followed.

On reaching the idol the girl placed her hand lightly at one corner, and the stone slowly revolved, leaving an opening quite large enough for a man to make his way through.

Lola lifted up the taper which she carried, and, as its feeble rays glanced into the dark cavity, Harry could see the figure of a man half defined in the gloom. Who could it be?

But they did not long remain in doubt.

The man moved towards them, and made his way through the opening.

They did not look a second time; and the next instant Harry had rushed forward, and had almost thrown his arms around his neck.

"Oh, dear old Phil!" he exclaimed, between crying and laughing.

Yes, it was indeed Phil, rather thinner and paler than when they last saw him; but still the same honest, brave fellow as ever.

Raymond was scarcely less overjoyed than Harry to see Phil once more, and the greeting between the two men was almost as affectionate.

For two or three minutes neither could speak; but when they did begin to talk, question and answer came thick and fast.

"How on earth did you find your way here, old fellow?" said Raymond, when they had got rid of a little of their excitement.

"Well, that's almost too long a tale to tell now, Master George; but I can say this, if it hadn't been for that little lass there, I should never have seen you."

Raymond looked surprised at this, and turned to Lola for an explanation. But she had disappeared, and at first he thought she had left them; but on looking

round he saw her leaning against one of the carved pillars, her face buried in her hands.

Thinking something was the matter, he went up to her and gently touched her shoulder.

She started and turned upon him like a frightened animal.

He saw in an instant, by the look of her eyes, she had been weeping and he suspected the reason.

"You are thinking of your own friends," said he, soothingly. "But come—courage, as you've said to us. If we escape you shall go with us, I swear it!"

Lola placed her hand in his and gave him a grateful look, and seeing her now more cheerful, he led her back to where Phil was standing and bade him tell how he came to be rescued.

Phil related how he and the sailors had found their way back to the hidden city, and how they had been attacked inside and his companions killed.

"How I came to be saved I don't know at all. The senorita here can tell you better than I."

Then Lola explained how she had seen the fight, and how she had recognized the dresses of the Englishmen. Believing them to be friends of the two prisoners, she had hastened down from the temple, but was only in time to save Phil's life. It was, however, only a respite, for she had induced the Indian to believe that he was attempting to kill a victim which belonged properly to the priests, and the soldier had accordingly given Phil up under the idea he would be sacrificed at the same time with Harry and Raymond.

Phil had been taken to the temple, and by great good fortune had been lodged in the tower, from which, as we know, access was easily gained to the apartment in which they were now standing.

The stone that had been thrown at him had inflicted rather an ugly wound, and for the first night he was very ill; this, in fact, had prevented Lola—who had gone in search of some celebrated herb, held in great veneration by the Indians, to cure him—from visiting the others the previous night.

When Phil's adventure had been related, Raymond told him all about his discovery of the Golden Island and the lake in the cavern, which astonished the honest fellow not a little; but he also told him of the fate for which they were reserved at the end of the next three days, and Phil at once saw the fearful situation in which they were placed.

"This is horrible," he said, with a shudder. "What can we do to get out of the mess?"

Raymond repeated the plan he had proposed to Harry, and asked Lola how the priests reached the island in order to attend the fire.

"In a boat," said she.

"Is it possible for us to get it?" he asked.

Lola shook her head doubtfully at first, but afterwards said she thought it might be done.

The priests went every morning at an early hour to perform their duty, so that whenever the prisoners made their escape it would have to be as soon as possible after their evening's meal. They would then have at least eight hours' start, and this would get them down the river a considerable distance, especially as the current was in their favor.

This was Raymond's calculation, not Lola's; for the girl was not certain whether the lake had any communication with the river. She thought it likely, as the people certainly would be present when the sacrifice was made, and she knew of only one way to the cavern; but as that was only used by the priests, it was very likely there was some other entrance.

It was so long since a sacrifice was performed on the Golden Island that she could remember very little about it. Indeed, what she knew about it had been told to her, as she was not present.

"Well," said Raymond, in a confident tone, "let us only have the boat, and we'll find our way out."

Lola thought for a moment, and then asked how they intended to get to the island.

"Why, do you not know there is a passage leading to it from this chamber?" asked Raymond, in surprise.

"No," said the girl, much astonished, for as Raymond had spoken to Phil in English, she did not hear him relate the story of his discovery.

This added to the difficulty, for supposing Lola obtained possession of the boat, how was she to know where to bring it?

Raymond saw there was only one way to get over the obstacle, and that it would be necessary to place some object or other so that Lola would know the spot, and he told her he would pay a visit that night to the cavern and pile up a heap of stones so that she should not make a mistake.

And so it was arranged.

Lola was to get the boat on to-morrow, and bring it to the spot where the heap of stones would be placed by Raymond.

In the evening, after sunset, she was to come with Phil, and the four were to start on their perilous journey.

This settled, Phil bade Raymond and Harry good-bye, for he had to return to his prison in the tower to avoid suspicion, and the two were once more left alone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SINGULAR DISCOVERY.

As it was near morning when Phil and the girl departed, Raymond thought it would not be safe to venture down into the cave to place the stones until after the Indian had visited them.

It wanted about an hour of the time, and he thought they could not do better than employ that time in sleeping, for he knew they would want all the rest they could get.

So both he and Harry went to sleep, and did not awake until the man came with their food.

After they had satisfied their hunger, Raymond and Harry prepared to go.

They lowered themselves down the hole as before, and crept through the dark and narrow passage.

Somehow or other their hearts felt lighter than they had ever done before.

"I believe Fortune will smile upon us at last," said Harry, in his confident tone.

"Well, it's quite time it did," replied Raymond, with a half sigh, for he was thinking of some one who was praying for him in England.

"Yes," went on Harry. "But we've had one piece of good luck, you know. We've got old Phil again, although poor Jack and Peter have gone."

But Raymond did not reply: he was buried in his own thoughts, and they were of such an absorbing nature that he did not hear his companion's voice.

They had got nearly through the passage by this time, and could see the light from the Golden Island shining on the rocks at the end.

In a minute more they had reached the cavern, and could hear the ripple of the water as it lazily dashed itself against the hard stone.

Raymond was in advance, and the instant after he stepped out into the blaze of the light he darted back into the shadow, almost overturning Harry on to the ground.

"Fool that I was!" he muttered.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" asked Harry.

"Hush!" returned Raymond, in a whisper. "We may be heard. How could we forget what Lola told us—that the priests came to attend the fire in the morning. As I stepped into the light, I saw a boat with two men put off from the island. If they saw me, we are lost for certainty."

Harry felt himself grow sick at the thought. Still, as Raymond was not exposed to view more than a second, he might not have been seen by the occupants of the boat.

"I say, captain," said he, "if they saw you, don't you think they would row towards this place, and satisfy themselves?"

"Perhaps they would," returned Raymond, "and that is why I am going to watch."

He laid himself down, and crept cautiously forward, keeping as much as he could in the shadow. He found that owing to the unevenness of the ground, he could lay quite unobserved, and watch what was going forward in safety.

"They're rowing across the lake," said he, in the faintest whisper, to Harry. "They're now about ten yards from the island. By Jove, I believe they're coming towards us!"

Anxiously he watched the little craft as it swiftly ploughed its way across the dark waters.

The head of the boat was certainly turned in their direction, but after a bit it veered round and went off to the left, and in a few minutes' time was lost in the gloom.

Giving a deep breath, Raymond said, in a tone of relief:

"Well, that danger's past. It was a narrow shave, rather."

"But not the narrowest that we've had," said Harry. "Not quite so bad as rattlesnakes."

The captain laughed, and rose to his feet.

"Now, then," said he, "to find some stones; but we'd better wait, and let those fellows get right away."

In a quarter of an hour's time they began to search about, and soon came across some fragments of rock.

There was a good-sized piece lying a little distance from the edge of the water, and the light from the island fell directly upon it.

This stone was one of the first pieces they saw; so Harry ran towards it, and was going to drag it to the edge of the lake.

He laid his hand upon the stone, and the next moment withdrew it, uttering an exclamation of horror as he did so.

"Captain," said he, "for heaven's sake tell me what this is."

Raymond hastened to the lad's side, and looked at the surface of the stone, which had caused Harry so much alarm.

He saw on the smooth surface a multitude of red spots, some very minute, but others the size of a large wafer.

By the looks of the uneven edges, they had been evidently caused by the splashing of some liquid.

"Well," said Harry, anxiously, his face growing pale as he spoke, "is—is it not blood?"

Robert did not reply at first, for the sight of the spots and stains had brought the fate to which they had been doomed by the priests so vividly to his mind, that for a moment his tongue seemed paralyzed.

In that instant of dread and doubt, a piercing scream, as of some one in distress, came faintly across the lake.

The listeners started with horror, for who could tell but what that sound was the last cry of agony forced from the lips of some tortured victim.

"This is dreadful, captain," whispered Harry, and great drops of perspiration stood upon his pallid brow.

The cries were repeated, but not always in the same tone.

Occasionally they were more shrill, and a few were quite hoarse.

But, whoever uttered them, they were some distance off, for it almost seemed as if it were the echoes which fell upon the ears of the listeners.

For a moment they had forgotten the scarlet stains on the stone; but they were suddenly brought forcibly to their minds by Harry, feeling a drop of some cold fluid falling upon his cheek.

He put up his hand as if by instinct, and instantly withdrew it.

The tips of his fingers were wet, and dyed the same crimson tint as the marks on the stone!

Here was an extraordinary puzzle, and Raymond could give no explanation of it.

Like Harry, he had taken the stains on the stones to be those of blood, and they had suggested all kinds of horrible ideas; but that blood should drip from the roof of a cavern was something entirely beyond his comprehension.

He looked up, expecting to see some terrible sight.

No, there was nothing but the hard rock—there could be no doubt about it, because the light from the island shone directly into the cave, and illuminated the roof perfectly.

As he gazed with upturned face, he felt a drop fall on his forehead.

He touched the spot with his finger, and tasted the fluid by just placing the tip of his tongue for an instant upon it.

It certainly had not the taste of blood, and he felt immensely relieved.

"Whatever this may be," said he, "I don't believe it is blood. It is impossible it could ooze through that hard rock. See!" and he threw up a stone, which struck the roof, giving a sound that left no doubt as to its nature.

Still, it was puzzling, and at last they came to the conclusion it was some red fluid which was formed in the rock, and which dripped down. But as for the cries, which they could still hear, though faintly, there was no explanation, unless, indeed, they came from some wild animal, although Raymond knew no animal which could utter such sounds.

However, they were forced to be satisfied with this explanation, and as there was no good in puzzling themselves while there was work to be done, they commenced to pile up the heap of stones in good earnest.

When they had made a pile about four feet high, they stood looking for a moment at the Golden Island, the light on which was burning as brightly as ever.

"Do you know," said Raymond, after a pause, "I don't feel inclined to give up our attempt so easily. It's true our escape is the chief thing we've got to look at; but why shouldn't we take some of the gold with us?"

Harry's eyes sparkled at the daring implied in Raymond's words.

Here were they doomed to die within the next three days, shut up in a place absolutely unknown to the world, and yet they could not only talk calmly about escaping, but even venture to think about taking the treasure with them.

"You know," continued Raymond, "if we're captured and brought back, it will make but very little difference whether they find we've taken the gold or no. We're sure to be put to death in any case."

"But we shall not be able to row so fast, shall we, with all that extra weight?" asked Harry.

"Why I'm not thinking of taking the whole island," returned Raymond, smiling. "It would take a frigate to do that. I will only take as much as we can carry comfortably; and I give you my word of honor that if I find there is the least chance of its preventing our escape, over it goes."

"I'm with you, captain—that you know quite well," returned Harry. "Whatever you attempt I'll do my best to help."

"Then," returned Raymond, beginning to strip, "I'm going to swim out to yon island and just have a look round."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE Island of Gold was about thirty or forty yards distant from where they were standing, and this of course presented no difficulty to a stout swimmer, which Raymond was.

In a few minutes' time he was in the water and half-way across.

Harry watched him intently as he came nearer and nearer at every stroke, and at last saw him touch the island and climb up its steep sides.

He then disappeared for a few moments behind the square altar on which the fire was burning, but afterwards came out on the other side with something in his left hand.

He then plunged into the water, and swam towards the land, but he did not seem to go so fast as before.

Waiting for breath, he reached the shore, and as he stood up, knee deep in the water, he held out something in his hand.

"Look here," he called out joyously—"here's a nugget worth 500, if it's worth a cent! It weighs over three pounds, I know."

Harry took the lump of gold in his hand, and felt a strange thrill go through him as he touched the precious metal.

He could hardly believe it to be true; but there was the shining mass in his hand, and there was no doubt about it.

"If we could only take fifty or sixty of those nuggets with us, we should have a nice little fortune," said Raymond. "There are plenty of them loose, and my only fear is about the boat. The gold has been piled upon the top of a mass of rock, and we can get some off easy enough."

On talking over the matter they decided to take the boat (if they should be fortunate enough to get it) over to the island, and load it with as much gold as would not interfere with their speed; and it would not take more than five minutes, as the gold was lying so loosely about.

This settled, they hastened back to their prison, for noon was rapidly approaching.

Their good fortune attended them, and they got back at least half an hour before the gaoler came.

"Well," said he, at last, "it cannot be helped. We have begun our task and must go on with it."

He led the way to the ruined staircase, and lowered

himself down, followed immediately afterwards by the others.

Swiftly they passed through the dark passage, although there was a little delay caused by Phil's stoutness and ignorance of the path.

However, they conquered all difficulties, and soon were standing in the cave with the light from the island shining upon them.

Phil had no time to express any astonishment at the wondrous sight, for their first thought was of the boat.

Had Lola been able to bring it?

Yes, there it was; and never did an Indian *pitpan* appear so welcome before.

In a twinkling they had taken their seats, and Phil seizing the oars, turned the boat's head, in obedience to Raymond's directions, towards the Golden Island.

Island, which they hoped never to see again, grew dimmer and dimmer.

They had started on their perilous journey safely—who could tell how it would end?

For quite a quarter of an hour no one spoke, for each was full of his own thoughts.

The light from the altar had become like a star, and they could not now see each other.

Suddenly they were alarmed by the unearthly screaming which had so startled Harry and Raymond in the morning.

It was ten times as loud, and seemed to be repeated in all directions.

But this doubtless was the echo of the sound as it rebounded from side to side.



At that moment an Indian darted forward with his spear uplifted, and with a horrid yell rushed upon the half-stunned man.

A few strong pulls and they were alongside.

The next instant Raymond was out and climbing up the sides of the island like a cat.

As near as they could tell the island was about six yards square.

The base, about six feet of which could be seen above the water line, was of solid rock; but all the top, to the depth of several inches, was covered with nuggets of gold, ranging from pieces the size of a nutmeg to those larger than a coconut.

It did not take Raymond long to pick up the nuggets and throw them to Harry.

The boat was loaded with its precious cargo in a very brief space of time, and Raymond, lowering himself into the boat, seized an oar, and bid Phil pull away for dear life.

And they did pull.

The little *pitpan*, heavily freighted as it was, darted through the dark waters, and the light from the Golden

Surely such cries could never proceed from a human throat.

An undefined terror of they knew not what seized Harry and Raymond, when to their amazement, and relief, too, they heard Phil give one of his short laughs.

"Cuss them birds!" said he. "They make row enough to wake the dead."

"Birds!" repeated Raymond. "You don't mean to say that birds make that frightful screaming?"

"I do, though," returned Phil. "I heard them once afore, only it was in Guinea, I think, and I'd swear to their music anywhere. It's the nightjar, and a nice critter he is, too."

"The nightjar," said Raymond. "Well, I'm very glad it is so, for there was something so horrible in its cry that I thought the cave was haunted."

After Harry knew the cause of the horrid noise he no longer had the same effect upon him.

The cries were still as loud as ever, but soon they got used to them.

When Raymond learned the habits of the nightjar, which Phil explained to him, he took courage, because he reasoned to himself that there was all the more probability of an opening somewhere.

It was not likely a large number of birds would be found in a cave with no outlet whatever.

Once or twice he ordered Phil to rest on his oars, and he found that the boat certainly was borne along, though very slightly, by the current. In less than half an hour's time they were in total darkness.

The Golden Island had vanished, and they had to row very cautiously.

By-and-by they fancied they could hear the noise of falling water, and soon it became a reality, for the sound grew louder and louder.

"Softly, my lad," cried Raymond to Phil, for he could feel the boat moving along at a quicker rate.

"I'm scarcely pulling at all, cap'n," returned Phil.

It was true. Like Raymond, Phil could feel that their speed had increased, and that the boat was being forced along by the current alone.

All at once the thought flashed through Raymond's mind that they were approaching a water-fall, and if so, what would become of them?

"Back—back your oar!" he shouted.

But it was too late.

Drawn as by a magnet, the frail craft darted forward, and the next moment they could feel themselves shooting down an incline.

The boat seemed to stop for a moment on the very edge of the fall—then over it went; while the rush and roar on each side of them was almost deafening.

Every one gave himself up for lost; but somehow or other they found themselves on the surface safe and sound, and wondering how on earth they had managed to escape the danger.

The fact was the fall was not more than two feet at most; but there were quite a half a dozen such falls, and the combined noise, together with the echoes, sounded quite as loud as if the water was pouring down a cascade at least two hundred feet high.

"Steady!" cried Raymond, as the canoe drew near another fall.

"Steady it was; and again they passed over in safety.

One after another the falls were got over and it was nothing short of a miracle the party escaped without mishap, for there were some very ugly rocks in the stream, any one of which would have shattered their boat had they been unfortunate enough to strike against it.

Soon the water began to get smoother, and Phil once more bent to his oars, or rather to his paddles.

The lake had evidently narrowed, for once or twice they found themselves against the sides of the cave.

Seeing this, Raymond ordered Phil to go very slowly and cautiously, and he and Harry put out their rifles so as to keep the boat from the hard rock.

Of course this delayed them considerably; but it could not be helped, and Raymond hoped to be able to make up for lost time when they gained the river.

They had been at least three hours in making their way through the cavern, and as darkness had set in nearly that time before they started, it would be almost day when they emerged into the river.

"Is not that a glimmer of light?" suddenly said Harry.

Eagerly the others looked, and there, plain enough, was a small patch of grayish light breaking the darkness in front.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Raymond. "Ten minutes more, my lads, and we're out of this horrible place."

The spot of light grew larger and larger the nearer they advanced, and soon they were able to define the rocks on either side.

It was evidently a very narrow opening, and scarcely seemed high enough to allow them to get through.

But this was a slight matter.

Ducking their heads until they were but a few inches above the side of the boat, they floated through, and directly they did so, they found themselves in a blaze of light, or at least it seemed so to them, shut up as they had been in the darkness for so long.

How joyful they felt when they saw the broad river it is almost impossible to tell.

It was as if they had renewed their lives, and nothing would have relieved them so much as to give a loud "Hurrah!" But this would have been dangerous, as they had the worst part—the journey down the river—to go through, and any noise would be likely to betray them.

As the daylight fell upon the glittering gold, Raymond shook his head.

"We must cover up that stuff somehow," said he.

"Put your jacket over it, Phil," he added.

Phil took off his hunting-dress and covered it over the mass, so that to a casual observer their cargo would not excite any suspicion.

"Which way, cap'n?" said Phil, taking his paddles once more.

Raymond looked at the sun, or rather the lighted part of the sky where he imagined the sun to be, for the forest was so thick that it would be some hours before the sun would have risen high enough to be seen.

"There is east, and we always had the morning sun in the temple on our right, so the city must be over there," said he, pointing behind him as he spoke.

"You'll have to turn, Phil."

No sooner was the command uttered than Phil had the boat round, and the next minute they were shooting at a smart pace down the River Frio.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A BURNING FOREST.

Phil managed to keep the boat going at a good speed,

and as the current was in their favor, the labor was considerably lightened.

Meanwhile Raymond looked anxiously at the banks on either side, as if expecting to see some of the Indians peep out from between the bushes, and both he and Harry kept their rifles in readiness in case they were attacked.

Unfortunately, their stock of bullets and powder was very small, for their fight with the Indians had sadly reduced it.

However, they were determined not to give in, and each one resolved to reserve the last three shots for themselves rather than be taken alive.

Raymond made out they had a good four hours' start before their absence would be discovered.

To that would have to be added the time the Indians would lose in making arrangements for pursuit, so that unless they were seen by any of the natives, they had at the very least six hours before their pursuers would reach them.

"When the sun gets up, I shan't be able to keep this speed up, though," said Phil. "It'll pretty well scorch us, I expect."

That was a difficulty Raymond had not calculated upon; but on looking at the dense foliage above, through which the rays could only partially force their way, he thought Phil was exaggerating the matter a little.

However, the farther they went he noticed that the sun had already made its effect felt, thick as the foliage was.

There was no longer the fresh green which looked so cool and grateful to the eye.

Yellow and brown tints had taken its place, and everywhere the trees looked parched and burnt.

"It's the dry season," said Phil. "And when the sun shines down as straight as a die upon your head, it'll give you pepper, I can tell you."

But there was no help for it, and whatever it cost them they must keep the boat going.

They had been about half an hour on the river, when Harry suddenly touched Raymond on the arm, and said in a whisper:

"Look there, captain—what is that?"

Raymond looked, and saw something white fluttering among the trees which lined the bank on his left.

"It looks like a woman's dress. Who can it be?"

But before they had time to guess, the bushes parted, and to their great amazement they saw the young Mexican girl to whom they owed so much standing on the bank, and making signs to them.

"Pull in, Phil," said Raymond, no little surprised at the sudden appearance of the girl.

When the boat came nearer to her, Raymond saw she was pale and agitated.

"I ran—all—the way," said she between each breath.

"I was—afraid—I should—miss—you."

In an instant Raymond saw she was almost exhausted with fatigue.

Her hair was all disordered and her dress torn, and she seemed as if she could hardly stand.

Losing no time, Raymond lifted her into the boat, and no sooner had he done so than she sank back in a swoon.

But it was only the reaction after the fatigue she had gone through, and in a minute or two she recovered, and uttered a few words of thanks in her soft, liquid tones.

"You do not owe us any," said Raymond kindly.

"It is from our side that the thanks should come. But tell me," he continued anxiously, "have they found out our escape?"

"No," returned Lola. "But you must lose no time.

They are very cruel," said she, with a shudder.

"You are brave," she went on, looking at Raymond with her large black eyes—"you will not let them take me back, will you?"

"No," returned Raymond.

The girl seemed satisfied, her color came back, and she lost her frightened look.

Meanwhile the sun climbed higher and higher, and its rays began to pour fiercely down upon the unprotected heads of the party.

How they wished for an awning of some kind!

But let it be as hot as it might, there was no rest for them.

"After Phil had his turn, Raymond took his place at the paddles, and though the heat and labor began to tell upon their frames, they would not give in.

Noon passed, and no signs of any Indians had been seen; so they became more cheerful.

Still they never relaxed their efforts, and every minute took them farther and farther away from their enemies.

Evening came, and yet they were alone: but so exhausted that Raymond thought it would be more prudent to rest awhile, and he determined to encamp for the night and start again at daybreak.

Lola had not been idle during their journey, and had displayed her abilities by catching three or four fine fish.

But they had to be cooked, and for this purpose a fire was necessary.

This, however, was an easy matter to men accustomed to a hunter's life, and it was not very long before the fish were broiling on the red embers.

After supper was over, they appointed their turns to keep guard, and soon three were asleep, while the fourth kept watch.

By break of day all were astir, and they repeated their meal of the previous night, for it so happened the spot upon which they pitched was destitute of fruit.

The fire had to be lighted afresh, and when they had finished their repast they prepared to set out.

The boat had been moored but a few yards from the place where they had encamped, and Harry ran down to the water's edge to see that all was right.

It so happened that some fifty yards up the stream nearer the hidden city, the river took a sharp bend,

and anyone standing where the boat was had a full view of the bank as it swept round the angle.

Harry glanced into the *pitpan* and was just returning to his companions, when he noticed some figures moving along the bank.

They had just reached the bend, and had but that moment come in sight.

As he recognized the plumes in their heads and the spears in their hands, his heart gave a great bound, for he knew that the danger so much dreaded had reached them at last.

In a few moments they would be overtaken, and there could be but one end to the conflict; for he could see their pursuers outnumbered them by at least ten to one.

He bounded rather than ran to his companions, and the latter scarcely needed his words to tell them something terrible had happened.

"Captain!" he gasped—"the Indians are upon us!"

Harry's announcement startled the party as if a thunderbolt had dropped among them, although it had a different effect upon each.

Raymond for a moment seemed paralyzed, his brain was in a whirl, while Phil uttered a good hearty curse. Lola alone seemed unaffected.

She stood with her hands clasped tightly together, and her eyes fixed upon the half-expiring embers of the camp-fire.

Her lips moved, but not a sound came from them.

What was it she was saying? Could it have been a prayer?

Raymond soon recovered himself, and his active brain was instantly on the alert.

"How far are they?" he asked, quickly.

"A hundred yards at most," returned Harry, as quick.

"Did you see anyone on the other side?"

"No."

The captain frowned till his eyebrows almost met.

"There's but one chance," said he. "We must reach the other side. They may not be able to cross."

Not a moment was to be lost.

It was impossible for them not to have seen Harry, and, indeed, Raymond could already hear their shouts.

But they would have to force their way through the jungle, and that would delay them a little.

The captain seized the girl and rushed with her down the bank, followed closely by Phil and Harry.

He placed Lola on the ground for a moment, while he jumped in the canoe, and had no sooner done so, when, to his astonishment, the girl darted back to the spot where they had encamped.

"Are you mad?" he shouted in an agony of impatience. "Good heavens, we shall be too late!"

And there was indeed but little time to spare, for their pursuers had caught sight of Raymond and had raised a terrific yell, while two or three of the foremost ones even discharged their spears in their rage.

But what was Lola doing all this while?"

She had flown back so rapidly that before Phil could turn round and dart after her, she had already fulfilled her purpose.

Seizing a half-burnt stick, which was still red, she applied it to a withered bush as dry and combustible as tinder.

At a puff of her breath it shot up into a blaze, and in an instant the bush was one mass of flame.

The trees nearest it were young saplings, round which some creeping plants were entwined.

The latter were simply dead wood, for at some time or other the roots had been torn up and the vines had shortly after died.

These, of course, rapidly caught, and soon the whole was the center of a fire which threatened to spread far and wide.

With an exultant look in her eyes, and waving the firebrand wildly over her head, Lola ran back to the boat.

She stood for a moment on the bank, and was about to spring into the canoe, when there was a sudden whizz through the air, and the girl fell forward into Raymond's arms, her shoulder pierced by an arrow discharged by one of the Indians.

But that moment was his last.

As Raymond caught the girl, he heard the sharp ping of a rifle, and the next moment the man fell dead, shot through the heart by a bullet from Harry's rifle.

Carefully laying the wounded girl in the canoe, Raymond, assisted by Phil, pushed the boat off, and in a few seconds were in the middle of the stream.

The Indians saw them, and shot a multitude of arrows, but by a miracle none of them reached their mark.

Howling with rage and disappointment, they tried to get nearer, but they were opposed by an impenetrable wall of fire.

Down below, the flames ran along the brushwood like lightning.

On, on it went, hissing like some venomous snake seeking its prey; and soon the sight became almost appalling.

Showers of sparks filled the air, many of them descending into the river and a few on the opposite bank, threatening to set the trees on that side also on fire.

The sky grew black and the sun seemed to be obscured.

The Indians soon gave up their attempt to force their way through the fire, and appeared to be in a state of the utmost terror.

Many were already surrounded by flames and could not extricate themselves, and their screams and cries were horrible to hear.

Others had managed to reach the bank, and in desperation threw themselves into the river.

Not more than thirty men succeeded in reaching the river, and some of these were already so fearfully burnt that they were unable to swim and so perished by another death.

A few were fortunate enough to get to the other side, but there was nothing to be feared from them, for directly they had climbed the bank they hastened as fast as they could in the opposite direction.

Meanwhile the men in the little *pitpan* strained every nerve to put as much distance as they could between themselves and the Indians.

Fortunately, what wind there was carried the flames away from them; but yet the fire made some progress in the direction in which they were going.

The heat was almost scorching, and their eyes ached with the fierce glare; but worst than all were the black clouds of insects driven out of the fire and smoke, many of which settled on their faces and hands, and caused them intolerable agony afterwards, for while the fire was burning they had no thought, no sense of anything but to escape.

The actions of the Indians were not unperceived by Raymond.

When he saw those who had escaped hasten back the road they had come, he knew they had nothing more to fear.

It was a moment of intense anxiety; but soon Raymond's brow cleared, for he saw that not only had the Indians left them in peace, but that the *pitpan* considerably outstripped the fire in its speed.

Confident that the worst was now past, he bent down and examined the wounded girl.

The force of the arrow, fortunately had already been spent before touching her, and it had not entered beyond the barb.

He drew it carefully out, and having washed the wound, bound it with a portion of her dress, for it was the only thing they were possessed of which could be thus used.

She was still insensible; but on feeling her pulse, he found that it still beat, and this removed one fear that he had—namely, that the arrow had been poisoned.

"She'll come round presently," said Raymond, in reply to Harry's anxious inquiry. "It's better she should not know what is going on. It wasn't very cheerful to hear those poor beggars' howls as the lads lay to;" and Raymond, seizing Harry's paddle, he and Phil made the little *pitpan* fairly dance through the water, and gradually left the burning forest farther and farther behind.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOME AT LAST.

But though they could no longer hear the fierce roar of the flames and the sharp crackle of the burning wood, all day long they could plainly see a dense cloud of whitish smoke hanging over the spot where they knew the forest was blazing.

When the night approached a dulled light took the place of the smoke, and was gazed at by the travelers with a sort of fascination.

However, when morning dawned they had got sufficiently far away to lose every trace of the smoke.

The glorious sun shone out in all its radiance, and seemed to be trying to chase away all thought of the scene of horror through which they had just passed.

Lola's wound proved to be but a slight one.

She soon recovered her senses, and proved of invaluable assistance to the travelers.

She was very expert in fishing, and while they were on the Rio Frio they never wanted a meal.

During the whole of their journey to the lake they did not meet with one native.

Swarms of birds they saw, who had been driven from their homes by the flames; and some of these had been rendered so tame by fright, that it was a common thing for them to alight on the boat, and any number could be caught.

When they had traveled some five days, Raymond knew they must be getting near Lake Nicaragua.

He remembered the flat marshy banks and the long rank grass, and he had reckoned that a few hours' rowing would bring them in sight of the lake.

He was not altogether free from anxiety, for he had a lively recollection of the storm, and he knew their *pitpan*, heavily laden as it was with its cargo and crew, could not stand any tossing about.

He consulted Phil, who was of the same opinion, but they decided that if they kept well within shore they could run in at any time when the weather threatened to be squally.

It was Raymond's intention to push on for Fort San Carlos, a small station at the mouth of the River San Juan, and about half a day's journey from the River Frio.

Once there, the party would be safe, and they could easily hire a *bongo* to take them down the river San Juan to Greytown, where they would be likely to meet with a steamer sailing for Vera Cruz.

It was Raymond's desire first to proceed to Mexico, and seek out Lola's family, and then to set out for England.

But he could not disguise from himself that the carriage of the gold would not only excite suspicion, but most likely bring him in danger.

Central America was not the most peaceable country in the world, while the natives had a habit of respect-

ing laws only when they chose; and if they knew a stranger was in possession of such a treasure, the chances were great but that they would endeavor to gain possession of it, even if they had to murder its owner.

However, he had two trusty friends, and with their aid and that of their rifles, it would be a difficult matter to rob him.

In due time they reached the lake, and shaped the boat's course for San Carlos, keeping as near as they could to the bank. When within a mile of the village, Phil suddenly shouted:

"Look there, cap'n! As I'm alive, there's a steamer!—and one of Uncle Sam's too! Hurrah!" he shouted, delightedly, waving his hat.

"A steamer in Lake Nicaragua? Impossible!" thought Raymond.

But in spite of his doubts, there she was, speeding merrily along, and sending out a cloud of black smoke from her white funnel.

"What on earth can this mean?" said Raymond, fairly puzzled at this sign of civilization. "This is something new."

"Never mind, cap'n," broke in Phil. "Let's hail the Yankee and see what she's made of."

Raymond had not the slightest objection, for he had more faith in New York than in Nicaragua; and springing to his feet, he waived his hat, and hailed the steamer.

Phil and Harry also did what they could to attract the stranger's attention, and soon, to their great joy, the paddles were reversed, and the steamer's course altered.

Swiftly it bore down upon them, and soon the *pitpan* was under her bow, and a crowd of people, passengers and crew, bending over the side, and staring at them as if they were wild beasts.

And certainly they did present rather a strange appearance.

Their faces were tanned a mahogany color, and their dresses half torn and dirty; while the heap of plantain leaves which covered the gold at one end of the boat, and the Mexican girl in her fantastic costume at the other, gave such a look of wildness to the party, that the people on board the steamer might well be excused if they stared rather rudely.

The captain, a fine-looking, athletic young fellow, had mounted the paddle-box, and inquired who they were and what they wanted.

No sooner had Raymond heard his voice than he started from his seat, and looking earnestly at the captain, said:

"We want to come on board, Daring Dick."

The effect of Raymond's words was magical.

The captain stared at Raymond, rubbed his eyes, stared again, but could make nothing of him.

"Who calls me Daring Dick?" he said. "I haven't heard that name for many a year."

"Nor I," answered Raymond, smiling. "At least, not since I left her Majesty's Life Guards. Don't you remember George Raymond?"

"George Raymond," repeated the captain with a look of blank astonishment. "You don't mean to say—"

"By Jove, so it is! Here, out of the way, you niggers." And the captain sprang off the paddle-box, scattering a crowd of negroes right and left, and rushed to the side of the steamer, and bending over, caught Raymond's hand, giving it such a hearty shake as threatened almost to drag it off his body.

"Old George, Raymond!" he cried—"to think of meeting you here in this outlandish place! Look sharp and get out of that washing-tub, and bring your family with you," he added, with a merry twinkle of his eye.

Raymond laughed as he replied:

"And a noble family it is, too, considering we have a queen amongst us."

The captain opened his eyes and gave a long whistle, glancing admiringly at Lola who sat in great state and with queenly indifference in the *pitpan*. She was not at all put out by the allusion to her rank, for the simple reason that as Raymond and his newly-found friend spoke in English, she did not understand a word of what was said.

No time was lost in accepting the captain's invitation.

The party were soon on board, and each one received a hearty welcome.

"Mind our luggage," cried out Raymond, as Phil threw off the plantain leaves before handing up the gold.

Great was the astonishment of every one when the glittering mass was revealed, and Raymond and his friends rose immensely in the estimation of every one on board the steamer.

Surely such a treasure was never seen before. Wherever could it come from?

Not the least astonished was the captain.

"Confound it, Raymond!" said he, "have you carried off a queen's fortune as well as the queen herself?"

"You shall hear all about it soon, my dear fellow," replied Raymond. "Let us first put it safely under lock and key."

This was soon done, and the party all adjourned to the captain's cabin, where dinner was served.

Great fun was caused by the awkwardness of Ray-

mond and his companions, for all had been accustomed so long to do without knives and forks, and they made the drollest mistakes.

However, all was got through, and then came a long chat.

Raymond recounted the wonderful adventures they had met with, and great was the interest of the listeners.

There were two or three lads on board about Harry's age, and with them he soon became great friends; and not only they, but every one else, looked upon the lad as a hero, when they heard of his hairbreadth escapes and daring.

When Raymond had finished his story, Captain Bedford explained how he happened to command a steamer on Lake Nicaragua.

He had been an ensign in the regiment of which Raymond had been a captain; but being a wild, harum-scarum sort of fellow, had soon run through all his money, and was obliged to sell out a few months before Raymond.

He then went to sea, and, after knocking about the world, was finally engaged to command a steamer by an American company who had started a new route to California.

This company had large steamers running from New York and New Orleans to Greytown.

At Greytown—a small village on the Atlantic coast—the passengers changed, and proceeded in a smaller steamer down the River San Juan (which connects Lake Nicaragua with the Atlantic) to Granada, on the north-western coast of the lake.

Here they journeyed overland to the Pacific coast, where another steamer took them on to San Francisco.

It was one of the steamers going to and from Greytown and Granada that Captain Bedford commanded, and his vessel was proceeding to the former place when he so fortunately met Raymond.

At Greytown, Raymond and his party bade adieu to Captain Bedford, who parted from them with regret; for a trip to Mexico would have been just to his taste. But he could not throw up his engagement, and so they went on alone, after waiting a few weeks for a steamer to take them to Vera Cruz.

Raymond took the precaution to dispose of the gold, and to invest the proceeds with the agent of a London banking firm at Vera Cruz, so that they had no more anxiety on that score, and they arrived safely at the city of Mexico.

Poor Lola was greatly agitated when she saw it, and she shed a good many tears at the recollections it brought back.

But she was greatly comforted by Harry, who told her that if her relatives were alive he and Raymond would not leave her until they were found, and if they were dead, why Lola should go to Europe.

But fortune was kind, and, after a few weeks' search, Raymond found her father and mother residing a little distance from the city.

They had long since given her up as dead, and their joy and amazement at receiving her into their arms, once more were beyond description.

And now my story has come to a close, and what remains can be told in a very few words.

Raymond and Harry bade adieu to Lola, who parted from them with tears in her eyes, and with a wistful look which Harry long remembered.

Accompanied by Phil, they set sail for England, and at last the dream of Raymond's life became a reality, thanks to the treasure from the Golden Island.

He was married to the lady of his heart, and as the old story-books used to say, they were happy ever afterwards.

As for Harry, he lived with them a little while, but soon a restless desire for change made him long for the old wild life, and he at last determined upon going to sea.

So he became a sailor, and in little more than five years was first mate of a fine East Indiaman, sailing between Calcutta and London.

His good luck kept to him, for the captain dying on one of the homeward voyages, the command devolved upon him; and so well did he do his duty, that the owners, on his arrival home, made him captain.

Since then he has made many a successful voyage, and is now a fine stalwart fellow of eight-and-thirty.

His wife is a dark-eyed, beautiful woman, with a soft, musical voice.

She speaks English very well, but with a slight foreign accent, and her Christian name is Lola.

She is adored by the sailors of her husband's ship, for she always accompanies him, and any one of them would die in her defense.

Phil is a grizzled old fellow of some sixty years.

He has sailed several voyages with Harry, and when on shore always takes up his quarters with "Master George," as he calls him.

He is one of the best playmates for children in the world; and the greatest delight you can give Raymond's little ones is to get them round old Phil, and hear him tell some of his marvelous tales.

There are a great many capital ones in his collection, but the one his listeners are never tired of, although they have heard it more than twenty times, is that of the wondrous Golden Island.

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